On the Process of the Disenchantment of Ancient Egypt

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Abstract

The study of history and of modernity has, in the West, traditionally been identified with certain themes and narratives. On the one hand, one has the narratives of historical progressivism – be they Christian, liberal, Marxist, or so forth. On the other hand, and on a related vein, one has the the discourses on disenchantment, which have accompanied us since the times of Rousseau, Nietzsche, and Max Weber. While the former is distinct from the latter insofar as they may perceive the progress of history as triumphal, as opposed to disenchanting or disastrous, the meta-narrative of a linear march forward of “history” has been ubiquitous.

In more recent times, this meta-narrative has come under the scrutiny of scholars, philosophers, and social scientists of various ranks. For the purposes of this thesis, particular attention is paid to the theoretical work of Eric Voegelin, who's analysis of the structure of “history” would appear to provide a serious challenge to the tradition. In particular, it shall be contended that a serious extension of Voegelin's methodologies to ancient civilizations – in this case, Ancient Egypt – challenges the thesis that disenchantment is necessarily linked to the advent of the concept, spirit, or revelation of Christianity.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

§1. In the Beginning

*"The earth will shake, and the seas will be unnavigable,
the sky will no longer be crossed by stars,
the stars will forsake their courses,
every divine voice will be silent, forced into silence.
The fruits of the earth will be spoiled and the soil no longer fruitful,
and even the air will hang heavy and close." -- Asclepius,¹*

In the beginning were the gods, and the gods were with the Black Land, and the gods were the Land, and the Land was good. Then *hu* ("authoritative utterance") left the land, and so went the gods, and the temple of the world was given over to *isfet* ("disorder, evil, falsehood, lies") and made profane. So, in two lines, may we understand the experience of the beginning and the end of the cosmological empire of the Pharaoh. Such at least may be adumbrated from the myths of its creation by the god, as related in the Memphite Theology, and the foreshadowing of its final death in the Hermetic myth *Asclepius*. Not coincidentally, the expressions of these two wildly divergent impressions of existence -- hope and sacrality of existence on the one hand, versus the mounting profanity of earthly existence on the other -- are equally divided by time. The Memphite Theology, with its confident, self-assured story of the creation, division, and reunification of the world, marks the very beginning of the kingdom of the Two Lands as a political order. In that myth, likely first composed in Dynasty V of the Old Kingdom², the legendary first Pharaoh, Menes, steps quite smoothly into the role of the creator-god Ptah. This he does by taking upon himself the creator's *hu* and *sia* ("perception") to unite the Two Lands of Horus and Seth, and thereby return the creation to its original condition as the undivided Risen Land of the god.

¹ Taken from Assmann, Jan; *The Mind of Egypt* (trans. Andrew Jenkins); Harvard University Press, 2002, p.73.

² Pritchard, James Bennett; *Ancient Near Eastern texts relating to the Old Testament*; Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1955; p.4. Jan Assmann, advances the argument that sections of the *Memphite Theology* were emended or added from later sources, with certain parts originating no earlier than the New Kingdom. See Assmann, Jan; *The Mind of Egypt* (trans. Andrew Jenkins); Harvard University Press, 2002, (p.345-355).

The Hermetic myth, by contrast, postdates the creation by over three thousand years. It also expresses the climate of spiritual decay and disorientation which had long since set in by the third or fourth-century AD. Indeed, the form of the expressed anxieties itself reveals the degree of rot at the center of Egyptian cultic practices and the understood meaning. The writer of the Hermetic tract self-consciously projects the anxiety of a final disenchantment of the world into a speculative future. The composer of the Theology, by comparison, takes for granted that the gods are the body and the life of the Land, and projects disaster and disorder into the past, to a time before Pharaoh manifested to mediate the divine plenitude back into a cohesive order. Under the prevalent conditions of the Old Kingdom, it seems, abandonment by the gods, and the disenchantment of the world is scarcely conceivable. And indeed, one might hardly wonder why, when the bodies and vitality of the gods are manifest in the wind, the sun, the land, the river... in short, in every facet of sensual existence.

The principal objective of this study will thus be to trace and to analyze the formation, development, deformation, and disappearance of one of the earliest and longest-lived civilizations ever known. If one accepts the traditional dating of the unification of Egypt under the legendary Menes at c.3100 B.C., and date the final gasps of something approaching ancient Egyptian culture to the period of Asclepius' composition in the 3rd or 4th century AD, one is presented with a time lapse of up to 3400 years. If one dates the end of Ancient Egypt to correspond to the loss of local, native autonomy to rule by foreign, ecumenic empires, the date might be shifted back to its conquest by Cambyses II in 525BC. At that juncture, Egypt was reduced to the status of a satrapy of the Achaemenid Empire, only to rebel and be reconquered by Persia, and then conquered again by Alexander the Great, Ptolemy I Soter, and finally by the Roman Empire, which would reduce its proper life span to

2625 years. As we proceed in the study, however, it will become apparent that dating the death of Egyptian civilization becomes a complex matter, requiring first a theoretical understanding of both that which constitutes Ancient Egypt, and that which would consist of its de-constituted state. This crucial, theoretical reflection will transpire in §2 and §3 of this introduction.

For the moment, it remains to be revealed why this study should, or at least might, be of interest to a student of political science. The answer, it seems to this author, presents itself in Max Weber's now famous thesis on the "disenchantment" of the world, which was proposed in a 1918 lecture at Munich University, now titled *Science as a Vocation*. As students and reader's of Weber's will readily recall, the sociologist credited the process of "disenchantment" with a host of quintessentially modern phenomena. Not least of those, for our purposes, included the peculiar spiritual malaise of modernity which the scholar noted as characterizing Western society in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This malaise, moreover, seemed to come with the equal propensity towards birthing generations of startling political apathy and loneliness, and mass societal movements of demonic political enthusiasm. In short, the banishment of the gods, and finally, even God, from the world was to be understood to have ushered in an era, not of spiritual fulfillment and liberty, but rather what Eric Voegelin, following Schelling³, termed "pneumopathology" or *nosos* -- spiritual disease. In the story of Egypt, we are presented with an early and often self-conscious example of the movements of disenchantment and re-enchantment of a long-lived and prosperous civilizational form. The dénouement of the Black Land is the tale of its deformation and disintegration under the conditions of ecumenic empires, of psuedo-philosophy and philodoxy, and of soteriological and gnostic spiritual movements. The broad

³ For discussion regarding Voegelin's debts to Schelling, see Day, Jerry, *Voegelin's Published Remarks on Schelling: Variations and Themes*, in Voegelin Research News, Volume VI, No. 1, February 2003, (<http://alcor.concordia.ca/~vorennews/v-rnVI1.html>)

similarities between the conditions and consequences of disenchantment for Ancient Egypt and for the modern world seem sufficiently evident to be topical.

The admitted difficulty with this project is one of finding proper scope. When I commenced along this path of investigation, it was originally with the mere intention of tracing certain religious movements which came afoot in the Hellenistic Age -- in particular, the attempts by certain Diadochic rulers to institute ruler-cults of one sort or another. That initial approach to the problem of god-kings in the age of multi-civilizational empires quickly became infeasible when attention was turned to the issue of Ptolemaic rule in Egypt. For, upon even a cursory glance at the events which transpired in Hellenistic Egypt -- be they either the installation of the cult of Queen Berenike I under Ptolemy II Philadelphus, or the emergence of metastatic and apocalyptic literature, such as the Potter's Oracle -- it was clear that what transpired was defined not by the creation of new symbols or institutions *per se*, but rather by the deformation or else the differentiation of established forms. Even more complicating was the realization that the differentiation of the compact Egyptian myth to include, say, a conscious speculation on the end of history was, in large part, a reaction to the deformation and disorientation of experiential life under the conditions of foreign rule. The scope of the study thus narrowed geographically as it deepened temporally. As the ruler cults of the Selucids proved not to be a comparable phenomenon to the quasi-Pharaonic rule of the Ptolemies, other Diadochic empires were set aside from the study. Conversely, as Ptolemaic rule proved to be an attempt by Graeco-Macedonian rulers to appropriate the symbols and authority of pharaonic rule, it became necessary to attempt a study of the emergence of those symbols in their experiential context.

What was brought to the fore was a superabundance of materials which seemed to tell the story of the rise and fall, and rise and fall, and rise and fall of one

of, if not the, most persistent civilization in recorded history -- one which seemed capable of surviving everything save its disenchantment. For the sake of remaining concise, it then became necessary to narrow discussion to certain key threads in the "semantic web of meaning" (to borrow a phrase from Egyptologist, Jan Assmann). To that end, this study focuses attention on the emergence and development of three persistent symbolic complexes in Egyptian thought, and the experiences which seem to underlie the symbolization process. Those three complexes are those of the Pharaoh, Death, and History, as they were expressed in changing form from the Old Kingdom to the New. A fourth chapter examines the circumstances and nature of their deformation in reaction to the experiences of the Ecumenic Age.

§2. Background and Literature Review

The history of Egyptian order, i.e., of its "semantic web of meaning" or form, has been a matter for reassessment since the beginning of the 20th century, and has continued as such into the beginning of the 21st. Amongst the chief considerations spurring the debate have been two. First has been the continued unearthing (often literally) of new, empirical materials by Egyptologists, which has served to provide new context and scope to events and daily life in the ancient Nile Valley. The translation of various monumental and other epigraphic materials -- such as the Pyramid Texts, the Coffin Texts, and the Egyptian Book of the Dead, among others -- into modern languages has proven to be a crucial source of original mythological material. To that, one should add the discovery of certain Egyptian records and historiographic materials, such as the Palermo Stone and Turin King List, which have served to complement or supplement outright, classical sources such as Herodotus, Manetho, Josephus, and the Old Testament. In addition, one must take account of the wealth of papyri newly recovered from the desert sands, which have yielded precious troves of literary prose, poetry, personal correspondence, and

incidental minutia regarding the quotidian operations of the Egyptian economy. Finally, one must include the burgeoning lists of iconographic materials which have proceeded from every excavation, together with similar discovery and dating of Egyptian architecture and of traces ranging from pottery, to tools, to entire ancient settlements and necropolai.

The second of the chief factors in the reassessment of the history of Egyptian order has its roots in a general loosening-up of certain conscious or habitual progressivist attitudes amongst the circles of Egypt scholars. While the tendency to treat Egypt, and pagan societies generally, as bumps along the triumphal march of a uni-linear Western history certainly did not dissipate into nothingness, a notable skepticism of universal histories projecting into definite or indefinite futures proved to be a trend. The upshot of such re-considerations, for our purposes, were new moves towards reinterpreting the collected stores of Egyptian materials from perspectives other than those suborned by positivistic or materialistic progressivism, or teleological historicism. Broadly speaking, what emerged, particularly from the quarters of the Chicago Oriental Institute and the Swedish Uppsala School, was a notable effort to comprehend the peculiar form of Egyptian order from within. This often came by resort to a phenomenological analysis of the Egyptian experience, as illuminated by the primary archaeological, mythological, and epigraphic materials themselves. Amongst those new analyses which will interest us presently will be those of John A. Wilson, Henri Frankfort, Jan Assmann, and, principally, Eric Voegelin.

The immediate structure of the Egyptian order, which emerged from this combination of reconsideration and discovery, proved to be something approximating the following⁴ :

<u>Period (Dynasty)</u>	<u>Year (Wilson)</u>	<u>Year (Assmann)</u>
Protodynastic Period (Dynasties 0-II)	3100-2700 B.C.	3100-2670 B.C.
Old Kingdom (Dynasties III-VI)	2700-2200 B.C.	2670-2150 B.C.
First Intermediate Period (Dynasties VII-XI)	2200-2050 B.C.	2150-2040 B.C.
Middle Kingdom (Dynasty XII)	2050-1800 B.C.	2040-1650 B.C. (includes Dynasties XI and XIII)
Second Intermediate Period (Dynasties XIII-XVII)	1800-1550 B.C.	1650-1550 B.C.
New Kingdom or Empire (Dynasties XVIII-XX)	1570-1165 B.C.	1550-1070 B.C.
Post-Empire Period (Dynasties XX-XXVI) (Includes Third Intermediate Period and Late Period)	1150-525 B.C.	1070-525 B.C. (excludes Dynasty XX)
Persian Period (Dynasties XXVII and XXXI)	525-359 B.C, 343-332 B.C.	525-359 B.C, 343-332 B.C.
Hellenistic Period	332-30 B.C.	332-30 B.C.

The reconstructed, pragmatic history of events in Egypt thus yielded evidence of a rather peculiar structure of ebb and flow in the articulation of Egyptian order. An approximate beginning is discernible at the political unification of the largely homogeneous population of the Nile Valley below the First Cataract under Dynasty

⁴ Tables derived from the chronologies included in the appendices to Wilson, John A., *The Culture of Ancient Egypt*; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, and Assmann, *The Mind of Ancient Egypt*.

0⁵ . One is then presented with evidence of increasing articulation of that order through mythopoeic symbolization and institutionalization under Dynasties I and II. This, though, is accompanied by some level of pragmatic resistance in either reaction to, or caused by, the displacement or suppression of local chiefdoms and princedoms in favour of centralized rule⁶. Nevertheless, as evinced by the iconography of the protodynastic Narmer Palette, the symbolization of all effective political activity as residing in the figure of the Pharaoh would seem to indicate that this distinctive form of Egyptian order was taking shape at its foundations. From Dynasties III through VI, the monumental, cultic, and mythological forms of pharaonic order are well established, and one is deep into the era of pyramid construction, with all of the attendant organization and mobilization of Egyptian society implied by such projects.

By the end of Dynasty VI, circa 2150 B.C, pragmatically effective order had collapsed, quite possibly due to the steadily increasing inability of the central government to assert itself against local officials and nomarchs⁷ . What ensued is an era which is generally termed the First Intermediate Period, and is defined by profound social disorientation, political disintegration, general disorder, and power struggles. That state of affairs would last a length of time which later Egyptian writers, such as Manetho, would imaginatively paint-over with the imposition of largely fictitious Seventh through Eleventh Dynasties. Dynasty VII, for instance, was said to have consisted of “seventy kings ruling for seventy days” from the temple-city of Memphis. Dynasty VIII, also seated in Memphis, seems to have given way to Ninth and Tenth Dynasties in the Lower Egyptian temple-city of Herakleopolis,

5 See Assmann, p.27-36, and chapter 1 of Frankfort, Henri; *Kingship and The Gods*; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948.

6 See Assmann, *The Mind of Egypt*, p.32-36. Cf. Wilson, John A, *The Culture of Ancient Egypt*, Chicago:University of Chicago Press, p.43-49.

7 See Assmann, *The Mind of Egypt*, p.81-85. Cf. Wilson, *The Culture of Ancient Egypt*, p.95-101.

while a parallel Eleventh Dynasty established itself in the Upper Egyptian temple-city of Thebes. The Herakleopolitan dynasties, however, seem to have consisted not so much of a steady royal succession, as an unsteady war for supremacy among rival princelings. The Theban dynasty, by contrast, was marked by comparative cohesion following its initial assertion of authority over Upper Egypt by the Theban nomarchs. Initial reunification of the Two Lands would only be achieved under Mentuhotep II of Thebes, circa 2040 B.C. A seven-year relapse into unrest would then follow after the death of Mentuhotep III (2010-1998B.C.). A final return to normalcy would then be achieved under the former vizier Amenemhet, who would ascend to the throne as the first Pharaoh of Dynasty XII.

Approximately one-hundred and ten years of disorder would thus be followed by a Middle Kingdom, lasting from 2040-1650B.C, which would quite consciously attempt to reproduce the forms of the Old. After four-hundred and ten years, a second collapse seems to have ensued. This may have been precipitated, in part, by similar factors as those which precipitated the strife of the First Intermediate Period. Indications of such troubles may be hinted at by the lengthy king-list of Dynasties XIII and XIV⁸, if it may be taken as indicative of artificially shortened rules, or the existence of parallel, rival kings. Regardless, the period from 1650-1550 is accepted to be essentially defined by the sudden conquest of Lower Egypt by a foreign people remembered only as the Hyksos. For the next one-hundred years, Hyksos pseudo-pharaohs would rule from the military encampment of Avaris in the northeastern Nile Delta. This would be the first era of foreign rule in the Black Lands over 1400-year memory.

The final repulsion of the Hyksos under Ahmose, circa 1550, was followed by a second re-establishment of the symbolic order of pharaonic rule. On this occasion,

⁸ Consult Appendix A.

however, the traditional spatial horizon of the Nile Valley, with its Red Sands to either side, would be breached from within. Succeeding kings of Dynasties XVIII and XIX would engage in increasingly aggressive campaigns into “Asia” (the modern Middle or Near East), Libya, and the upper Nile beyond the Second Cataract. While initially expeditionary or punitive in nature, the Egyptian military excursions would take on the character of annexations, as lands as distant as Kadesh on the Orontes River in the Levant would be subjected to direct or indirect Egyptian rule. It is in the midst of this expansion to incorporate non-Egyptian peoples into the Egyptian order when one detects an expressed movement towards syncretism and universalism in the cosmological myths of the Empire. This movement would become particularly florid under the reign of Akhenaton (née Amenhotep IV, 1369-1353), and in the so-called Amon Hymns, of which we will have more to say. By the end of the Dynasty XIX, Egypt’s borders are recorded to have been under intermittent harassment by a collection of migratory peoples, collectively remembered as the Sea Peoples. By the reign of Ramses III, in Dynasty XX, the Sea Peoples had become a major threat to the established powers in the region. Ultimately, they would be implicated in the collapse of Hittite, Mycenaean, and Mittani empires, and Egypt itself would be forced to beat-off several wholesale invasions under Ramses III. In the wake of his reign would follow several relatively short-lived Pharaohs, who would preside over the collapse of the Empire, and the end of the Ramesside Dynasty. Wilson, for his part, records this as the effective end of pharaonic rule proper, and the end of even the pretense of continuity of the “inner dynamic” which had animated Egypt proper⁹. In pragmatic terms, what followed the end of the Ramesside Dynasty was a Twenty-First Dynasty of formal disintegration, as the temple of Amon in Thebes exerted its effective independence from the Pharaoh in Tanis. Further political disintegration would follow in Dynasties XXII through to the beginning of XXVI, as Egypt fell under the rule of a

⁹ Wilson, *The Culture of Ancient Egypt*, p.288

Libyan dynasty, which imposed a loosely confederated, quasi-feudal structure on the already divided Black Land. This time period, spanning 1069-664, is now termed the Third Intermediate Period, to reflect the general breakdown or suppression of the ancient, accepted form of Egyptian order.

What followed would be a brief revival under Dynasty XXVI, lasting roughly one-hundred and forty years, followed by Egypt's conquest by the Achaemenid Empire under Cambyses II in 525. At that time, Egypt as a whole was reduced to the status of a Persian satrapy. Later in 486, under the rule of Darius I, a rebellion would be attempted with the connivance of the Athenians. It would be unsuccessful, but a second rebellion under the leadership of Amtyraeus (the grandson of one of the two leaders of the first rebellion), would triumph and re-establish native pharaonic rule. In 343, Artaxerxes III would succeed in re-imposing Persian domination for a brief period, which ended when the Achaemenid Empire itself was shattered and swallowed by the Graeco-Macedonian armies of Alexander the Great. After Alexander's death in 323 would follow a long series of wars amongst his *Dioscuroi* (Successors) for control of his empire. Those wars would not fully resolve themselves into a workable equilibrium of powers until 276, when Antigonas II Gonatus brought the Greek and Macedonian mainland firmly under the control of an Antigonid dynasty. The main, Asiatic body of the former Persian Empire, on the other hand, would be organized under the Seleucid dynasty of Seleucus I Nicator in 305. Egypt and Coele-Syria, would fall to the rule of the Ptolemies in the same year, while the kingdom of Pergamum would be carved out of the Seleucid holdings in Anatolia by an Attalid dynasty in 283.

Egypt would continue under Ptolemaic rule until 30 BC, at which time the land, after several decades of civil strife, was reduced to a Roman province by

Octavian, following the defeat of Mark Antony, and the death of his lover, the last of the Ptolemaic rulers, Cleopatra VII.

A structure of crashing ebb and flow thus emerges from a cursory review of the pragmatic record of events in the Nile Valley, which begs for explanation in the face of poignant questions. For one, why should the Egyptian expression of order remain so remarkably static over the immense span of nearly three millennia? For another, why the dogged insistence on the restoration of an ancient order following every experience of disorder? Finally, and most pointedly, what is it about the experiences of the age of ecumenic empires which broke or dissolved that ancient form so thoroughly that no further restorations were possible?

Several responses to these questions have been proposed in recent decades. Frankfort's analysis of the phenomena privileged emphasis on the relatively static form of Egyptian symbolization and institutionalization¹⁰. He judges that any substantial change in these between periods of order to be incidental, accidental, or otherwise unwanted deviations from a state of perceived perfection. In the very conscious attempts to revert to form after every marked deviation, Frankfort finds the outward signs of "The peculiar attitude of the Egyptians towards change"¹¹. Rhythmic, natural changes, with their essence of periodic renewal, were held to be significant and meaningful, while singular events were consciously ignored as insignificant. What was significant to the Egyptian mind, by the scholar's reckoning, was the renewal of lasting or eternal forms. Frankfort derived that reckoning by referring to such positive evidence as the general, and intentional lack of individuality or distinguishing characteristics in the statues of Pharaohs, as well as

¹⁰ See Frankfort, Henri, *Kingship and the Gods*, p.6, 24-27, and *Ancient Egyptian Religion*, p.viii and 88.

¹¹ See Frankfort, *Ancient Egyptian Religion*, p.viii.

the negative evidence provided by such lamentary texts as *A Dispute Over Suicide*¹². In the former, he apprehended an Egyptian penchant for suppressing or discarding elements which were particular or unique. In the latter, he perceived evidence of the decidedly negative reaction of Egyptians to that deviation from eternal form which was represented by the First Intermediate Period. By his estimation, however, the unavoidable fly in the ointment of a culture bent on avoiding all singular, unique events was the unavoidable problem of one's own singular death¹³. The Egyptologist is suggestive in pointing out that it was the breakdown of the mortuary cults in eras of distress, which drove the religious innovation of the Middle and New Kingdoms. Chief amongst these would be included such practices as the appropriation of the Pyramid Texts, originally meant for use in mortuary cult rituals of the Pharaoh, for personal use as a collection of magical spells and protections against the uncertainties of the afterlife¹⁴.

Wilson, a colleague of Frankfort's, by contrast, perceived in the recorded mythology and religious practices of the Two Lands, evidence of a never-resolved tension between "materialism" and "spiritualism"¹⁵. By his account, it is the pragmatic events of an overarching history which served to drive into consciousness a spiritualized religiosity -- marked by the acknowledgment of individual conscience, universality, and the relatively profane and contingent nature of earthly existence. Wilson's estimation sees this latent spiritualism emerge under the conditions of the First and Second Intermediate Periods, only to be discarded when material conditions improved, or else suppressed and erased from memory when, as

12 See Pritchard, James B, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1955, p.405. The text purports to be a record of a dispute between a man and his *ba* ("manifestation", here translated as "soul"), over the issue of his intention to commit suicide in order to escape the corruption, evils, and general disorder of the First Intermediate Period. The text, which we shall review at greater length in a later section, is usually taken to demonstrate the extent of existential disorder which, for the average Egyptian, proceeded from the political disaster of the period.

13 See, Frankfort, *Ancient Egyptian Religion*, p.88-89.

14 See *ibid*, p.102-106.

15 See, for instance, Wilson, *The Culture of Ancient Egypt*, p.92-95

in the Amarna Revolution, it disturbed the established order of things¹⁶. Wilson's analysis of the structure of the history of Egyptian order thus interprets it as a series of advancements and retreats from a realization of fully transcendent religiosity, movements which would be explained by the Egyptian attachment to the attractive memory of material contentment under the conditions of the Old Kingdom.¹⁷

Assmann contends with these earlier views, which largely interpret the Egyptian experience of time as cyclical and a-historical. In this, he agrees with Voegelin's analysis, in so far as he detects both implicit and explicit memories of unique events to have been preserved in the "semantic web" of Egyptian culture. In certain cultic rituals, late monumental inscriptions, and both cosmological and historiogenetic myths, Assmann finds the memory of changes which have been recorded precisely for the reason that they have been felt to be meaningful. For instance, he relates that a memory of meaningful change is implicit in the semiology surrounding the development of the symbolic relationship of the gods Seth and Horus. In late cultic rituals, the former -- once understood as the essence of power, to be humbled and set to order by Horus' law (*maat*) -- came to be associated, not with an internal dynamic of Egypt, but with the forces of "Asia". In this way, non-Egyptian lands and peoples were brought into a meaningful position within the Egyptian experience of order. That which lay beyond the periphery of the realm was no longer represented as a meaningless, outlying chaos at the edge of the visible horizon, but rather as a power which existed in tension with the law represented by Egypt proper¹⁸. Similarly, Assmann points to the New Kingdom, and the increased monumental recording of the particulars of the family life and of the individual triumphs, accomplishments, and eccentricities of the Pharaohs as evidence of a mounting attachment to the unique and dynamic, as opposed to static and

16 See *ibid.*, p.235, and Assmann, *The Mind of Egypt*, p.226-228.

17 See *ibid.*, p. 124, 296-297.

18 See Assmann, *The Mind of Egypt*, p.389-393.

unchanging, in Egypt's semiology. This new-found, institutionalized habit of recording memory of the unique, Assmann argues, belies the facile belief that the Egyptian experience of time was purely cyclical from its beginning to its end.

Voegelin's analysis of Egypt, as has been previously implied, also came to disagree strenuously with the accepted tradition which regarded the Egyptian experience of time as unwaveringly cyclical. In the context of his five volume meditation on the philosophy of history, entitled *Order and History*, Voegelin is characteristically more explicit than the previous authors on the theoretical and methodological issues which surround the truthful interpretation of ancient or alien symbols and institutions. The issues which he identifies, which relate intimately to the phenomenology of consciousness, are addressed in detail in §3 of this introduction. At present, it will suffice to relate an overview of his analysis of the structure of pragmatic events in Egypt, as related by Egyptians themselves via the then-available epigraphic and mythological materials¹⁹.

In Volume I of *Order and History*, Voegelin identifies the Egyptian experience of existence as being "cosmological". In doing so, he set it apart from such "anthropological" experiences as those which emerged from Hellenic philosophy, and the "soteriological" experience of existence epitomized by Christianity. By this, it was to be understood that the Egyptian articulation of order was, like its contemporaries in Mesopotamia and Minoan Crete, a reflection of an experience of existence in which human beings were perceived as partaking of, or participating in, a divine "cosmos" (ordered universe) through the mediation of a society which served as a cosmic analogue, or "cosmion". As such, proper, truthful, or fulfilling existence was understood to be contingent upon the proper or skillful participation in the overarching cosmic structure through participation in the cosmion. Moreover,

¹⁹ It is worth noting that when Volume I of *Order and History* was published, Voegelin had at his disposal the same materials then available to Frankfort and Wilson.

like Frankfort and Assmann, Voegelin recognized in the Egyptian cosmological myth, an experience of the “consubstantiality of being”. This is to say that the cosmos of the Egyptian was enchanted and full of gods, in contrast to the disenchanted and profane world of Weber’s lamentation. Be that as it may, like Assmann and Wilson, but unlike Frankfort, Voegelin recognized that this “compact” experience of the cosmos, which had informed the interpenetrated symbol-making and institution-building of the Egyptian order, had undergone periods of “differentiation”. In these instances of “differentiation”, the traditional symbols or institutions were reworked, rethought, complemented, or simply questioned in such a manner as to spark the development or evocation of new myths and symbols of human existence. Indeed, such experiences as gave rise to differentiation and “mythopoesis” (myth-making), appeared to Voegelin to have sparked such happenings as the aforementioned reworking and appropriation of the Osirian mortuary cult by the masses of Egyptians following the collapse of the Old Kingdom. A further example would include the increased symbolization of Pharaoh as Son of God, as opposed to creator-god, in the Middle and New Kingdoms²⁰. For Voegelin, such shake-ups of the traditional form of order, together with the interpretation of the experience of breaks with that form as *isfet* (“disorder, falsehood, evil, lawlessness”) make it possible to speak of an Egyptian experience of history as a history of order -- particularly given that such formative and de-formative experiences were clearly expressed in the epigraphic and mythological memory of Egyptians themselves.

In Volume IV, Voegelin complemented his initial remarks on Egypt (which did not dither on matters post-dating the New Kingdom), with an analysis of the Turin King List and the king-list of Manetho, which he deemed as instances of “historiogenesis” -- a specific form of speculative myth about which more will be

²⁰ These changes are described at greater length in Chapter 1.

said in §3. Suffice to say that, by Voegelin's estimation, with the creation of such king-lists in the Late and Ptolemaic Periods, one is presented with lists which purport to trace the origins of a contemporary order to a definite, divine rule at the beginning of time. As a result, such myths explicitly express an experience of time which construes it as a line running from a well-defined, divine origin to the author's present, and thus demonstrates an experience of linear time within the context of the cosmological consciousness of pagan Egypt. Thus, one finds, over and against the pragmatic history of existence, that the author's of the historiogenetic king's lists had introduced parallel, paradigmatic histories. As a result, histories of the type were, in significant ways, functionally equivalent to the experience of parallel sacred and profane histories which was known to Israel and to Christianity. All in all, the peculiar Egyptian stubbornness which had expressed itself in the continuous attempt to return to past forms of order seemed comprehensible as a consequence of a drive to escape the profane atmosphere of pragmatic events, via a return to a paradigmatic age of the past. This drive, however, would seem to speak not of an a-historical, but rather an anti-historical experience. History, in other words, was acknowledged and known, but "known" to be an evil (*isfet*) to be escaped or avoided through the effective activity of pharaonic order (*maat*).

§3. Theoretical section - Voegelin

Voegelin contended with the occurrence of history in Ancient Egypt in two separate phases of his writing of *Order and History*; first in Volume I of that exercise, and then again in Volume IV. That second approach to the subject matter, in his own words, was necessitated by a broadening and deepening of his perspective of the problem of history in societies uninspired by the pneumatic epiphanies of Israel²¹. Briefly stated, while in preparation for the composition of Volume IV, the author

²¹ See Voegelin, Eric, *Order and History* (henceforth: *O&H*), volume 4: *The Ecumenic Age*, Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000, p. 51 and 64.

was increasingly confronted with a wealth of mythological, literary, and mytho-speculative materials from non-Judeo-Christian, indeed, non-"Western" societies. These materials, he found, belied the facile view that "history" originated exclusively from the Jewish tradition of revelation. "History" -- understood as the occurrence of essentially different and differentiating events in time, which are experienced as a linear sequence extending from a definite origin to the present of the myth-maker, and extending perhaps into a definite end -- had happened before. Against the traditional view of pagan time as cyclical, Voegelin, while analyzing the mythological materials brought to his attention, found evidence of an experience of linear time in even the pre-Israelite civilizations of Mesopotamia and Egypt. The expression of such an experience, he found, was particularly marked in those classes of myths generally dubbed "cosmogonies", "theogonies", and "anthropogonies"²².

This general insight was brought to explicit awareness following three key observations. First, in spite of their usual classification, genetic myths purported to be of one type or another almost invariably seemed to contain within themselves a degree of speculation on the other types of being. Thus, for instance, and in spite of its appellation, Hesiod's *Theogony*, by speculating on the aetiology of the spatio-temporal characteristics of being (i.e. the origin of Gaia, Okeanos, Time/Chronos, the Mountains, etceteras), revealed itself to be as much a cosmogony as a theogony. Furthermore, by including in its form a speculative myth on the origin of human beings, the *Theogony* was equally classifiable as an anthropogony. Far from being a phenomenon limited to the peculiar genius of a particular Euboean poet, however, Voegelin identified similar stratification and diversity of subject-matter at work in a diverse collection of myths. Among them, one would need to include the myths of Homer, the Memphite Theology of Ancient Egypt's Old Kingdom, the Mesopotamian Enuma Elisha, the Sumerian King List, and so forth.

²² See *ibid*, chapter 1, §1.

The second key observation, and perhaps the more important, was the author's recognition of a fourth layer of speculation embedded within the form of the speculative myths. This layer of speculation took as its immediate subject matter not the cosmos, nor the gods, nor man, but rather the meaningful coming-into-being of the myth maker's contemporary political order -- or disorder, as the case may be. Thus, whereas the Western tradition had long held that "history" -- linear time -- was unique to those traditions derived from the Mosaic revelation of God in time, Voegelin observed a consciousness of history expressed within a variety of mythic forms originating in both the East, Near East, and Hellenic West. The traditional classification of the pagan experience as fundamentally a-historical seemed in error in light of emerging archaeological discoveries, and unencumbered readings of classical writings. Lacking any formal term for this sort of speculative myth on history, Voegelin coined the term "historiogenesis"²³, permitting one to speak of an "historiogenetic" myth which places primary emphasis on speculation on the origins of a contemporaneous political state. Taking the *Theogony*, once again, as an example, one might observe such an undertone of historiogenesis in the inclusion of such tales as the theft of fire by Prometheus, and the opening of Pandora's box. Both tales can be seen to speak not to the issue of the issuing forth of human beings into some timeless, a-historical existence, but rather reflect the poet's concern with accounting for the current, lamentable state of affairs in his native land, which is experienced as following upon a previous, perhaps preferable state.

By contrast, in the *Works and Days* by the same author, historiogenetic reflection approaches the foreground in the tale of the ages of gold, silver, bronze, heroes, preceding Hesiod's own age of iron. Here again, the audience is presented with something like a myth of the Fall from a previous, qualitatively better state of

²³ See *ibid*, p.51-53, and chapter 1, §1.

affairs, into the contemporary order or disorder of the poet's present. In this state, it is the lot of men, by the decree of Zeus, to live and eat by the sweat of their brows. In the *Theogony*, historiogenesis is subsumed, along with cosmogony and anthropogony, into the overarching tale of the genealogy of the gods. In the *Work and Days*, the accent is placed upon explaining the origin of the present political order, while speculation on man, the cosmos, and the gods becomes secondary and supportive to this effort.

Voegelin's third observation concerned the previously implied "quarternarian" structure of being, as experienced and expressed in the compact, pre-philosophic, pre-revelatory myth. This structure -- comprehending the cosmos, man, society, and the gods -- differs from other, more "differentiated" forms in that the various poles of the compact, mythic reality are experienced as consubstantial with one another. This consubstantiality expresses itself most vividly in the fuzzy boundaries separating the gods from man, society from heaven, the cosmos from gods, and so forth. The compact myth is one in which the difference between mortals and immortals is one of mere duration and durability, in which heroes may be "filled" by the gods²⁴, and where nature and animal life may speak with a voice issuing from the wellsprings of divinity. It is this consubstantiality of the partners in being which necessitates that any proper speculation on origins address all four poles of compact reality. To state the matter differently, Voegelin observed that the compact, relatively undifferentiated experience of the historiogenetic myth-maker, must necessarily be mediated and expressed in the symbols and language of an even less differentiated body of local myths. The compactness of that myth thus expresses the experience of a history of order in terms of a something which is intimately related to the other realms of being. In particular, that something is related to the more lasting, and thus "higher" and more "real" reality of the cosmos, or the gods.

²⁴ See Homer, *Iliad*, 10:482

When history -- the transition of one order to another -- has happened, it must be explained, perhaps in terms of ruler's loss of the mandate of heaven (*ming*), or the punishment of Zeus, or the end of an astrological "great year", or the simple connivance of the gods in an agreement to end the current order of civilization²⁵.

The fourth insight regarding the myth of the cosmological empires subsumes the other two. This was the recognition that the form of the cosmological myth was capable, and indeed, had, contained within itself expressions of experiences of the Beginning and the Beyond, without breaking the cosmological form itself. In so far as that was the case, the compact myth proved comparable to the more differentiated, pneumatic insights of the Israelite prophets and the noetic insights of the Hellenic philosophers.

In Voegelin's later work, the generic symbol of the Beginning, on the one hand, stands-in for the multifarious speculative myths which attempt to relate the present of the author to the *arche* of being, "before" either time or history. For Voegelin, as the Beginning is experienced only in so far as it is mediated by the myth, it is not an object of cognition to be apprehended by a subject -- neither of thing-reality or a "something" of intentionalistic consciousness²⁶. Speculation on the Beginning, however, attends upon an experienced need to order existence -- one's "participation in being"²⁷ -- according to the exigencies of the present. The common source of such need extends from the personal experience of formation or deformation -- of being formed or deformed in one's existence -- and the attendant necessity of adjusting existence according to its formative source.

²⁵ See Voegelin, *O&H*, v.4, chapter 1, §2.

²⁶ See Voegelin, *O&H*, v.5, chapter 1, §1 and §2.

²⁷ See Voegelin, *O&H*, v.4, p.1-2.

Speculation on the Beginning, therefore, may be expected to take root whenever there has been an experience of deformed existence followed by formed or formative existence, or vice versa. In Voegelin's words, it is the horror of the fall from being – or the possibility – rather than the fear of death, which motivates the search (*zetesis*²⁸) for its ground²⁹. When the events of pragmatic history engender or encourage the sense of being formed or deformed in comparison to a previous period of existence in time, history itself may become the subject of the search for paradigmatic existence. Such an experience may thus give rise to a myth of a sacred or paradigmatic history over and above the succession of pragmatic events. However, as the scholar himself points out in that later work, given that “the order of history emerges from the history of order”³⁰, it is not, strictly speaking, correct to speak of history as an object of intentionalistic consciousness – a thing at the disposal of an independent subject (the myth-maker), who stands outside of it. It is rather the possibility of the fall from being, brought to consciousness by an experience of a current state of affairs, which is measured against the memory of a previous state, which drives the mythopoeic exercise. History, then, is a symbolic complex of sorts, comprehending the memory of relative states of existential order and disorder. Thus symbol may itself then be employed in a speculative search for the Beginning, which is meant or expected to discern meaning behind the vicissitudes of pragmatic events.

On the other hand, if History and the Beginning are symbols engendered by the experience of a Before and After, there remains the question of Voegelin accounting for that experience, and the matter in which it is brought into existence. The philosopher's preliminary thoughts on the matter are explicated in the introduction to Volume I:

28 See *ibid*, p.236, 250. Cf. *O&H*, v.5, chapter 1, §6.

29 See Voegelin, *O&H*, v.1, p.1-2. See also, the lecture, *Structures of Consciousness*, Toronto: York University, 1978, (<http://alcor.concordia.ca/~vorennews/v-rn113.html>), 5.II. Cf. v.5, p. 27-28, 38-41.

30 See Voegelin, *O&H*, v.1, p.1-2, and v.4, p.45-51.

"But man is not a self-contained spectator [of the drama]. He is an actor, playing a part in the drama of being and, through the brute fact of his existence, committed to play it without knowing what it is. It is disconcerting even when accidentally a man finds himself in the situation of feeling not quite sure what the game is and how he should conduct himself in order not to spoil it... Participation in being, however, is not a partial involvement of man; he is engaged with his whole existence, for participation is existence itself" ³¹

Existence as "participation in being" carries with it the obvious connotation of a Platonic *methexis*, of a being partaking of a higher and more lasting order of being. This would be concomitant with a connotation that existence is not identified with that superior order. Given that, one would thereby interpret that the experiences of a Before and After, which engender or evoke the symbols of History and the Beginning, would correspond with an experience of existence in qualitatively better or worse participation than had previous been the case. By Volume IV, while not rejecting his original formulation, Voegelin reformulates the problem by introducing the generic symbol of the Beyond. ³²

With the substitution of the Beyond for "participation in being", certain ambiguities or deficiencies in the earlier formulation were addressed or clarified. Simultaneously, the task of analyzing the multifarious experiences of formation and deformation which have provoked the symbolization of a History or a Beginning was eased³³. The new question may be expressed thusly: if the mythopoeic

³¹ Voegelin, *O&H*, v.1, p.1

³² See, for instance, Voegelin, *O&H*, v.4, p.51-56, as well as *Structures of Consciousness*. By this time, Voegelin has evidently moved sharply away from the use of the phrasing "participation in being", as evinced by its seemingly complete absence in these later works. In lieu, beginning in v.3, he appears apt to prefer to speak of "the Metaxy" or "metaleptic reality" when discussing the experience of participating in the "process of reality".

³³ In particular, Voegelin seems to have noted as early as Volume II of *O&H* that the "a-cosmitic" experience of Gautama Buddha was out-of-sync with the theistic experiences which issued from Hellas and Israel, as well as the experiences of the cosmological empires. The life of the historical Buddha was simply not easily represented as a quest for "participation in being" *per se*. By Volume IV, and with the adoption of the more flexible symbols of the Beyond and the Ground, a level of penetration of the Buddhist problem becomes possible -- at least with regards to the role of Buddhism in stabilizing the ecumenic empires of India and China. Remarkably, Voegelin himself does not deign to delve into the specifics of the Buddhist experience, though he seems to have been aware of both Arnold J. Toynbee's and Karl Jaspers' efforts in that

symbolization of a sacred or paradigmatic History and of a Beginning are responses to the experience of being formed or deformed in one's existence, what is it which forms or deforms? The formulation of the question itself reveals what, to Voegelin, was and is the principal obstacle to an existential analysis. For, when generic "being" is proposed as the ground of existence, the question "what is it?" arises, and reveals the paradox of language, which requires a non-"it", literally, a non-thing, to be signified in terms denoting "thingness". This paradox of language then opens the door to a stream of "sophistic" problems in which the "thing", "being", having been divorced from the experiential complex of consciousness-reality-language, becomes either the subject or object of an empty conceptual analysis. This conceptualization, in turn, deforms both the language symbol and the experience of reality which evokes it. In recognition of the issue, by the publication of Volume IV, Voegelin had unambiguously shifted his preferred choice of language from a description of existence as "participation in being" towards "tension towards the Ground" – a tension which, when experienced, gives rise to the various symbolizations of a "Beyond".

The Beyond, as a consequence, is understood to be a generic symbol of a universal human experience of that which forms existence – of a "something" which orders existence through divine movement and counter-movement³⁴. It is, in short, symbolic of the ground of ordered existence. An experience of the Beyond is thus understood to lay behind all questing for order, and all symbolic articulations or order, and this comprehends the compact, cosmological symbolism of cosmos, man, society and the gods, its movement towards differentiation in the mythopoeic form of cosmogony, anthropogony, historiogenesis, and theogony, and, ultimately, the symbolism of a Beginning and a History. The order of history thus emerges from the

regard. He also appears to have classed Buddhist texts, as well as Daoist and Confucian, classical and Christian texts, as among the significant works then contributing to the rebuilding of Western science (*Anamnesis*; p.390).

34 See, Voegelin, *O&H*, v.4, p.64, and *Structures of Consciousness*, section II.

history of order, in the sense of the story of the approach and the withdrawal of the Beyond to and from consciousness, and the formation or deformation of existence which proceeds from such metaphorical movement.

Commencing in Volume I, and continuing with greater emphasis and elaboration in Volumes IV and V, Voegelin moved to relate the symbols of the experiential interiority of men to the experiential exteriority of space and time. In the myths of the Near East, he found a recurrent theme of a spatio-temporal orientation of the bodies of men in their environment playing heavily into existential symbolism, and into the symbolism of political order as a result. Following, and in agreement with, Henri Frankfort³⁵, Voegelin observed that this interplay between symbols of exterior and interior worlds was particularly striking in the mythology of Ancient Egypt. As both scholars observed, there existed in Egypt a peculiarly dualistic tendency in mythical symbolizations of meaning. This tendency revealed itself in such symbols as the Two Lands, the Black Earth and the Red Sands, Geb and Nut, Seth and Horus, Isis and Nephthys, the Double Crown, and so forth. The dualistic proclivity, however, found ready explanation in the spatial experience of the ancient Egyptian, which, by archaeological evidence, consisted in a dense, homogenous, rural population settled in near urban densities along the fertile Nile Valley, and bracketed on either side by uninhabitable expanses of desert. The Egyptian experience of their space, naturally enough, centered upon life along the two-dimensional "line" of the Nile River, and would emphasize the duality of east bank and west bank, up river and down river, as both objective and subjective signifiers of location. As the symbolism of order grounded itself in the practical experience of life orientated along a quasi two-dimensional space, the symbols engendered – particularly those of the Old Kingdom – found their footing and voice in the now familiar dualistic mode of expression. And indeed, this dualism found an

35 Cf. Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods*, p.16-24, and Wilson, *The Culture of Ancient Egypt*, p.45-46.

easy foil in the exemplar of the contemporary cosmological order of Mesopotamia. There, life along the three-dimensional plane of the crescent valley between the rivers Euphrates and Tigris, and wide experience of travels to and invasions from beyond that horizon, lent itself easily to a symbolization of order in terms of the four quarters of the world³⁶.

While the immediate experience of space provided an entry-point for an exegesis of Egyptian mythopoesis, Voegelin broke with Frankfort in denying that the spatial analysis, together with the experience of consubstantiality, was adequate to the task of explaining all of the peculiarities of the Egyptian myth. Unlike Frankfort, who perceived the Egyptian myth to emphasize a static experience of time, Voegelin perceived in Egypt, as well as other Near Eastern and Western civilizations, a more complicated experience of time being expressed in mythic form. As suggested by the earlier words on historiogenesis, the scholar sensed a need to re-analyze the experience of time expressed in various contexts on something approaching a case by case basis. By his admission, in his early work, he took too easily for granted the traditional view of linear time as an exclusive experience of the Judeo-Christian tradition³⁷. By Volume IV, he explicitly rejected such a view as unsupported by the empirical materials available to modern scholars. Stated bluntly, cyclical time was argued not to be a common experience expressed in either the ancient West or Near East. Rather, experiences of rhythmic time, linear time, time as destroyer, and of parallel sacred and profane times predominated the field³⁸. In the case of Egypt, an anti-historical attitude, rather than cyclical experience of time, seems to have been the norm.

36 For Voegelin's full exposition the primordial Egyptian experience of space and orientation, and its reflection in myth and symbols, see *O&H*, v.1, p.102-111.

37 In Voegelin's words, he admits to once mistakenly belabouring under the belief that history "as a meaningful course of events on a straight line of time was the great achievement of Israelites and Christians, who were favoured in its creation by the revelatory events, while the pagans, deprived as they were of revelation, could never rise above the conception of cyclical time", see *O&H*, v.4, p.51 and 129.

38 See Voegelin, *O&H*, v.4, p.128-133.

Voegelin's own attempt to symbolize the common existential component underlying the various spatio-temporal symbolizations led him to adopt the term "okeanos" from Ancient Greek, as part of an *oikoumene-okeanos* symbolization which he found to underlie all pre-ecumenic conceptions of world. In its original context, "okeanos" carried with it a range of meaning taken from its usage in a variety of mythological and philosophical works, ranging from Homer's epics to the Hellenistic work of Berossus. In any given situation, *okeanos* could refer to the primeval ocean-god who encompassed the Earth (Gaia), the Mediterranean Ocean, the Atlantic, the boundary of the world-spanning ecumene, or the horizon of humanity's earthly habitat – its *oikoumene*. Voegelin's usage favours its use as a synonym for "horizon", in the specific sense of the horizon of existence. Thus, to the degree that a myth emphasizes spatial orientation and location as the primary experience of existence, "okeanos" denotes the physical horizon of the myth-maker's world. In so far as the myth emphasizes temporal location and orientation, "okeanos" denotes a temporal or historical horizon, while in any particular case, the symbolic horizon of the myth could carry a range and combination of temporal meaning. Finally, in so far as the Beyond is experienced as located beyond that horizon in some sense, the mode in which Okeanos is symbolized reveals something of the myth-maker's experience of that which is Beyond³⁹. In the Ecumenic Age, however, that compact symbolization which blends world, cosmos and existence in the structure of *oikoumene-okeanos* begins to fragment. Under the pressures of either or both of, what he termed, concupistential exodus and spiritual exodus, the ecumene may seem to expand infinitely, while the physical horizon may disappear in favour of an all-pervasive mystery of existence⁴⁰. In the wake of such

39 See Voegelin, *O&H*, v.5, p. 262-272, and 380. For the problem of the independently arisen Chinese ecumene, see chapter 6 of that work. See also v.5, p.43-45. Cf. *Structures in Consciousness*, in particular sections I.2-3, II, III, and IV.

40 See Voegelin; *O&H*, v.4; ch.3, §4, pt.2.

disorientating experiences, stability has been found in the better differentiated symbolic complex of Ecumenic Empire, Spiritual Outburst, and Historiography.

Stated briefly, the new triad, which, on a more differentiated level of consciousness, is equivalent to the more compact *oikoumene-okeanos* (habitat and horizon) complex, becomes the effective replacement for the latter. The former ecumene of a particular cosmion of a particular people in particular spatio-temporal relations, gives way to the world-spanning habitat of humanity – an Ecumenic Empire. That humanity is revealed as universal through the Spiritual Outburst of a Buddha, an Isaiah, a Jesus, a Mani, a Mohammed, or so forth⁴¹. These reveal the meaning of the epoch-creating differentiations of consciousness within the cosmos as the movement of the process of reality beyond its structure. The horizon of mystery, in turn, displaces from the spatial dimension, to the temporal dimension, as the Question of origins resulting from attempts at Historiography leads seekers and explorers in the inductive quest of the Ground of reality, and therefore of existence itself⁴².

In the following chapter, specific discussion of the horizon as it pertains to the Egyptian cosmological myth will become topical, as it relates intimately with the symbol of the Pharaoh as Horus-Harakhte, as well as his status as mediator of the Beyond.

41 See *ibid*; p.134-145, 270, 304-316, 328-329. Note that Voegelin seems to avoid mentioning either Plato or Aristotle in these instances, though he elsewhere contends that the philosophers' theophanies were equivalent to those of the figures named, and that both subsisted within the Ecumenic Age.

42 See *ibid*; p.316-330.

Chapter 2 - The King

§1. The King as Creator and Horizon

- 4a. To say by Nut-Nekhbet, the great: This is (my) beloved, N., (my) son;
 4b. I have given the horizons to him, that he may be powerful over them like Harachte.
 4c. All the gods say: "It is a truth that thy beloved among thy children is N.,
 4d. to whom one will do service of courtier for ever." ⁴³

In the mythology of Ancient Egypt generally, but the Old Kingdom particularly, the figure of the king plays the part of both the center and the periphery of the drama of existence in the Nile Valley. In the self-understanding of the early dynasties, the king as Horus-Seth plays the central bulwark of political order as the manifestation of law and force⁴⁴. As Horus-Harakhte, the Great God, he is the limits of the earthly stage of existence⁴⁵. As Horus-Re, he is the life-giving illumination of the Black Land. As Horus-Osiris, he is the god of all that becomes, and god of all which comes into its eternal completion in death⁴⁶. He is the lord of the two horizons, of life and death, outside of whose reach lies only meaningless chaos, oblivion, and un-true existence. Conversely, to subsist within the reach of his mediated divinity was to subsist in *maat* -- to truly exist, and to exist truthfully.

In the Memphite Theology, whose first composition is conventionally dated to the 5th Dynasty, this all-encompassing presence of the king is even subtly extended to the creation of the world which is Egypt. The inscription preserved on the Shabaka Stone opens with a pious hymn to the greatness of the king, and proceeds to present the inscribing of the story of Ptah's creation of the world as an act of filial piety:

⁴³ From Mercer, Samuel A.B; *The Pyramid Texts*; Longman, Green & Co; New York, London Toronto; 1952; p.20-21, Utterance 6.

⁴⁴ See Frankfort, Henri; *Kingship and the Gods*, p.21-23; and Assmann, Jan; *The Mind of Egypt*, p.75-77.

⁴⁵ See Frankfort, Henri; *Kingship and the Gods*, p.36-40.

⁴⁶ See Frankfort, Henri; *Kingship and the Gods*, p.40-47; cf. Assmann, Jan; *The Mind of Egypt*, p.57-61.

This writing was copied out anew by his majesty in the house of his father Ptah-South-of-his-Wall, for his majesty found it to be a work of the ancestors which was worm-eaten, so that it could not be understood from the beginning to end. His majesty copied it anew so that it became better than it had been before, in order that his name might endure and his monument last in the House of his father Ptah-South-of-his-Wall throughout eternity, as a work done by the son of Re [Shabaka] for his father Ptah-Tatenen, so that he might live forever.

The inscription then continues by relating the story of the division of the land between Seth and Horus at the command of the elder earth-god, Geb:

[Geb, lord of the gods, commanded] that the Nine Gods gather to him. He judged between Horus and Seth; he ended their quarrel. He made Seth the king of Upper Egypt in the land of Upper Egypt, up to the place in which he was born, which is Su. And Geb made Horus King of Lower Egypt in the land of Lower Egypt, up to the place in which his father was drowned which is "Division-of-the-Two-Lands." Thus Horus stood over one region, and Seth stood over one region. They made peace over the Two Lands at Ayan. That was the division of the Two Lands.

Upon reconsideration, though, Geb reverses the decision, and awards the Two Land to Horus, "the jackal of Upper Egypt", and Horus stands triumphant as the "uniter" of the Land:

*Then it seemed wrong to Geb that the portion of Horus was like the portion of Seth. So Geb gave Horus his inheritance, for he is the son of his firstborn son.
Geb's words to the Nine Gods: "I have appointed Horus, the firstborn."
Geb's words to the Nine Gods: "Him alone, Horus, the inheritance."
Geb's words to the Nine Gods: "To his heir, Horus, my inheritance."
Geb's words to the Nine Gods: "To the son of my son, Horus, the Jackal of Upper Egypt /// Geb's words to the Nine Gods: "The firstborn, Horus, the Opener-of-the-ways."
Geb's words to the Nine Gods: "The son who was born /// Horus, on the Birthday of the Opener-of-the-ways."*

This odd legal quarrel over the proper ordering of the Land is then tied back to the shaping of the world in Ptah's heart and on his tongue:

There took shape in the heart, there took shape on the tongue the form of Atum. For the very great one is Ptah, who gave [life] to all the gods and their kas through this heart and through this tongue, in which Horus had taken shape as Ptah, in which Thoth had taken shape as Ptah. ..

*He gave birth to the gods,
He made the towns,
He established the nomes,
He placed the gods in their shrines,
He settled their offerings,
He established their shrines,
He made their bodies according to their wishes.
Thus the gods entered into their bodies,
Of every wood, every stone, every clay,
Every thing that grows upon him
In which they came to be.
Thus were gathered to him all the gods and their kas,
Content, united with the Lord of the Two Lands.⁴⁷*

Thus is the meaning of the unification of Upper and Lower Egypt illuminated by the myth. In the beginning, there was none but Ptah, in whose heart and upon whose tongue took shape the gods, their towns, and their “bodies” (cult statues) of *every wood, every stone, every clay*. A quarrel then breaks out between Horus and Seth, when Osiris is “drowned” in the river. With Osiris “dead” and departed to the throne of the underworld, the entitlement to rule the over-world is claimed by both his son and his brother. Under his dual authority as both father of Osiris, which made him elder to both gods, and his status as earth-god, Geb steps in to conciliate the parties. He then does something which was never uttered by Ptah -- he divides the land upriver from that down-river and assigns each god his part. Geb then quickly overturns his previous decision, however, when it seems to him that the division is “wrong”. Rulership of the united land is transferred to Horus, the first-

⁴⁷ From M. Lichtheim; *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, Vol.1, p.51-55.

born son of Osiris, who manifests his status as “uniter of the Two Land” by taking on the double-crown of Upper & Lower Egypt (“the Two Great Magicians”).

Clearly, though, this dense block of symbolism requires further unpacking in order to permit comprehension. On a first approach, it is a requirement to recall that the “Horus” referred to by the cosmological myth is not understood as a name signifying some entity of a distant past -- though the figure is certainly treated as such in the later, historiogenetic king-list of Manetho. Rather, the Horus of the Theology is a symbol of the living king of the Two Lands, much as Osiris is to be understood as a symbol of the dead king, who has passed-on into the underworld as an effective and vital *ka*. In the cosmological myth of Egypt, any particular living king is a manifestation of the god Horus, whose essence and vitality are neither limited to the spatial extent of a king’s body, nor limited by that particular body’s duration. In effect the death of a king is insignificant to *the* king Horus; Horus, the god, causally precedes his divine manifestation in a particular body.⁴⁸

In this, Horus is not unique, but rather typical of the gods of Egypt. In their plenitude of divine vitality the *ba*’s (manifestations) of a god may find threefold expression in the form of a cosmic body, a cult body, and an animal body⁴⁹. Thus, for instance, might one speak of Ptah as cosmically embodied in the Risen Land, while simultaneously manifest in his cult-image in Memphis, and in the animal form of the Apis Bull. In the case of Horus, the animal manifestation simply happens to be the Egyptian king, whose mummified body, in death, then becomes a manifestation of Osiris. The king, by virtue of his status as a divine, consubstantial partner in creation, slides easily into the role of creator in life, and protector in death. In a significant sense, the king is the co-creator of cosmological order, who brings

48 See Frankfort, Henri; *Ancient Egyptian Religion*; p.102-103, Frankfort, Henri; *Kingship and the Gods*, p.40-47, and Assmann, Jan; *The Search for God in Ancient Egypt*, p.116-123.

49 See Assmann; *The Mind of Egypt*, p.57, 375. Cf. Frankfort; *Ancient Egyptian Religion*, p.8-15.

effective spatial and political unity to a “wrongly” divided world. Moreover, he brings effective order to the ranks of the cosmic gods through ritual activity -- not the least of which is represented by the ritual submission of and integration of Seth, god of war and force, to Horus’ *maat*.

The founding king of Egyptian order is thus depicted as the Great God who mediates *maat* for society, men, the cosmos, and the gods, and thereby brings creation to its proper conclusion in a divine order. In addition, given that each lawful king is recognized as the “Horus” and “Great God” of his own period, it is to be understood that each fresh accession to the throne is a symbolic re-enactment of, and participation in, that final act of creation which is represented by unification. That much is evinced by the coronation rituals inscribed in the Pyramid Texts:

194a. *The two doors of the horizon are open; its bolts slide.*

194b. *He has come to thee, N.t (Crown of Lower Egypt); he has come to thee, Nsr.t (Uraeus);*

194c. *he has, come to thee, Great One; he has come to thee, Great-in-magic (Crown of Lower Egypt).*

194d. *He is pure for thee; he is in awe of thee.*

195a. *Mayest thou be satisfied with him; mayest thou be satisfied with his purity;*

195b. *mayest thou be satisfied with his word, which he speaks to thee:*

195c. *“How beautiful is thy face, when it is peaceful, new, young, for a god, father of the gods, has begotten thee!”*

195d. *He has come to thee, Great-in-magic (Crown of Lower Egypt).*

195e. *It is Horus, who has fought in protection of his eye, Great-in-magic.* ⁵⁰

When the ascending king approaches the “Great-in-magic” -- the crown -- he takes upon himself not only political rule in the modern sense, but also takes possession of the horizons, and responsibility for asserting *maat* both over force (manifested by Seth) and against *isfet*. His ascent is further ritually reinforced by his

⁵⁰ From Mercer, p.66, Utterance 220

seating on the royal throne, which is itself the cult-body of the goddess Isis⁵¹, herself the mother of Horus by the god Osiris. The king's identification as the manifest Horus, together with his divine kinship with the deceased king, is thereby affirmed, even in such cases as when physical parentage cannot be demonstrated.

The status of the king as the *ba* of the creator-god is further asserted in Utterance 249, which evokes the symbolic imagery of the Heliopolitan cult of the sun-god Re -- Ptah of Memphis' summodeistic competitor⁵²:

264a. To say: O ye two contestants, announce now to the honourable one in this his name:

264b. N. is this sasa-plant which springs from the earth.

264c. The hand of N. is cleansed by him who has prepared his throne.

265a. N. it is who is at the nose of the powerful Great One.

265b. N. comes out of the Isle of Flame,

265c. (after) he, N., had set truth therein in the place of error.

265d. N. it is who is the guardian of laundry, who protects the uraeus-serpents,

265e. in the night of the great flood, which proceeds from the Great.

266a. N. appears as Nefertem, as the flower of the lotus at the nose of R;

266b. as he comes forth from the horizon every day, the gods purify themselves, when they see him.⁵³

In a further hymn, on this occasion directed to Atum of Heliopolis, the king, as Horus-Harakhte, is credited with closing and controlling the doors of the horizon:

1593a. The doors stand fast upon thee like Inmutef;

1593b. they open not to the West; they open not to the East;

1593c. they open not to the North; they open not to the South;

⁵¹ See, Frankfort, Henri; *Kingship and the Gods*, p.43-44, 143, 245.

⁵² "Summodeism" is a term employed, and presumably coined, by Voegelin to describe the peculiarly relaxed competition in cosmological orders which seek to present a "highest god" whom precedes all other gods as their creator. In the Egyptian instance, rival summodeistic gods included Ptah of Memphis, Amon of Thebes, Re of Heliopolis, and Khnum of Elephantine. In spite of what a modern mind might conceive as the logical inconsistency present in the coexistence of several "first gods", the mythic experience of reality seems to have permitted for the coexistence of the rivals within the free form of speculative myths. For more on the issue, see Voegelin, Eric, *O&H*, v. I; p.267-268; cf., Frankfort, Henri; *Ancient Egyptian Religion*; p.16-19, and Assmann, Jan; *The Search for God in Ancient Egypt*; p.111-113, 119-123.

⁵³ From Mercer, p.76, Utterance 249

1593d. *they open not to those who are in the middle of the land;*
 1594a. *(but) they are open to Horus. It was, he who made them; it was he who made them stand fast*⁵⁴

In the compact, yet pregnant symbolism of the cosmological myths of the Old Kingdom, the king, as Horus, stands as the towering⁵⁵ mediator of all things from the Beginning and all things Beyond. In his capacity as the legitimate heir of Osiris, he brings change and creation to its meaningful conclusion in *maat*. As Horus-Harakhte, he simultaneously manifests as the spatial and existential horizon, who secures the kingdom in punitive expeditions against the "Nine Bows" (the traditional symbol of the foreign enemies of Egypt) and controls access to the underworld through the door to the West⁵⁶. In his general capacities as Horus, the king is furthermore responsible for maintaining *maat* by upholding or performing cultic rituals which order and appease the gods who quiet literally embody the world. Moreover, the effective mediation of *maat* throughout the Two Lands called for the refraction of the king's divinity through a vast cosmological bureaucracy, in which each representative was expected to act as a reflection of the king's substance in all decisions and activities⁵⁷. In truth, however, all of these variegated activities and symbolic functions of the king are compactly implied in the very duty to uphold *maat* -- a word which the more differentiated English language can only render sensibly with some difficulty, and much circumlocution. For *maat* is not a symbol referring to an inner quality of the king, in the manner in which Plato's Socrates, for instance, suggests that *dikaiosyne* is a characteristic of the *psyche* of the philosopher.

54 From Mercer, p.246-247, Utterance 587.

55 The "towering figure" of the king was usually and literally depicted as such in Egyptian art, even at its foundation. In the protodynastic Narmer Palette, the gigantic figure of the conquering King Narmer already dwarfs that of his enemies, and his army is conspicuously absent. Rather, the king himself is depicted as both the effective and formal agent of the conquest of Lower Egypt. The motif of the king as the manifestation of all political agency carries forward even many centuries later, and is present even in the pictographic records of the conquests of Thutmose III of Dynasty XVIII (c.1504-1450), in which the king assumes supernatural proportions. See Frankfort, Henri; *Kingship and the Gods*; p.6-12 and Appendix.

56 By all indications, "the West" seems to have been a euphemism for the burial grounds in Abydos, on the western bank of the upper Nile. Pharaoh's ability to mediate grant or bar access to the afterlife is thus a direct function of the ability to bar access to burial.

57 See Frankfort, Henri; *Kingship and the Gods*; p.33-35. For more on the lack of a specific body of doctrine or law, and reliance upon *maat* as a guide for action, see *ibid*, p.80-82. Cf. Assmann, Jan; *The Mind of Egypt*; p.51-52.

Rather, *maat* entails all proper performance of those meaningful activities which mediate and maintain the cosmological order of reality, with its four-fold, consubstantial structure of cosmos, men, society, and gods. Without the king and his orthopraxic activity, *maat* is simply absent from the world.

§2. The King as Destroyer

Following the breakdown of central order towards the end of the reign of Pepi II, there irrupted forth a series of new symbols, which were intended to convey the meaning of the experience of the First Intermediate Period. Apparently, to a one, the judgment was negative, and the letters, literature, and new forms of ritualistic materials of the age (like, for instance, the Coffin Texts), reflect varying experiences of loss and disorientation in the absence of an all-encompassing king. In chapter 2, §2, we will delve into the issue of how the Egyptian orientation and attitude towards death was profoundly altered by the breakdown in the king's mediation of the Beyond. At the present, we will direct attention towards the issue of the institution and symbolization of the king as an expression of Egyptian order, in the wake of the disintegration of Dynasty VI.

With the dissolution of all practical authority to the local chiefs, nobles, and notable patrons, the kingdom entered, for the first time, into a period in which the practical matters of existence had profoundly disassociated from the paradigmatic. In practical terms, one could not count on any local authority to act as a reflection of the king's *maat*, one could not even find protectors against ravaging barbarians:

...Every man fights for his sister, and he protects his own person. Is (it) the Nubians? Then we shall make our (own) protection. Fighting police will hold off the barbarians. Is it the Libyans? Then we shall turn away. The Madjoi fortunately are with Egypt. How is it that every man kills his brother? The military classes (xv 1) which we marshal for ourselves have become barbarians, beginning to destroy that from which

they took their being and to show the Asiatics the state of land. And yet all the foreigners are afraid of them. ...(10)...

The grasping for power and local advantage has instead become the routine of the day, even as the struggle dissipates power among a thousand undeserving hands, and makes a mockery of *maat*:

Why really, Elephantine, the Thinite nome, and the [shrine] of Upper Egypt do not pay taxes because of [civil] war... What is a treasury without its revenues for? The heart of the king (must) indeed be glad when truth comes to him!" But really, every foreign country [comes]! Such is our welfare! What can we do about it? Going to ruin!

Indeed, the pragmatic situation is so chaotic that the creative energies of the gods are stanching:

Why really, women are dried up, and none can conceive. Khnum cannot fashion (mortals) because of the state of the land.

In spite of the evil conditions, however, the speaker, Ipu-Wer, can only proclaim bewilderment at what the Great God seems to have commanded to be set loose upon the Two Lands:

... Authority, Perception, and Justice are with thee, (but) it is confusion which thou wouldst set throughout the land, together with the noise of contention. Behold, one thrusts against another. Men conform to that which thou hast commanded. If three men go along a road, they are found to be two men; it is the greater number that kills the lesser. Does then the herdsman love death?

The formulation of the problem is clear: *hu*, *sia*, and *maat* lie with the king, who, as the manifest Horus, is the mediator between men, society, cosmos, and the gods. If the mediation of order (*maat*) is absent, it can only be understood to mean that Horus is absent, or that he has commanded *isfet* to be set upon Egypt. Within

the boundaries of the established cosmological myth, it was inconceivable that men would choose disorder, as such would equate with non-existence. Utterly bewildering, though, was the thought that the king Himself would command that the pyramids and the monuments of the world fall to the depredations of time. Moreover, that he should wish that force, rather than law, should rule, and that the resulting dis-order should be subjected to the further disintegrating influence of the chaos of the peoples from over the horizon. The experiences and the thoughts are so disturbing that the speaker can only vacillate between laying blame on the heart of the Lord of All, and on the evil hearts of the people. He can only prevaricate between exhorting the king to reverse his decision to wreck havoc upon creation, and wishing that the evil seed of men had been destroyed in the first generation. The only means of redressing the current calamity of existence which suggests itself to Ipu-Wer is to implore the king to restore the Land to its former glory:

Remember (xi 1)... how fumigation is made with incense, how water is offered from a jar in the early morning.

Remember fattened ro-geese, terep-geese, and sat-geese, how the divine offerings are made to the gods,.

Remember how natron is chewed and how white bread is prepared by a man on the day of moistening the head.

Remember how flagstaffs are set up and a stela is carved, while a priest purifies the temples and the house of god is whitewashed like milk; how the fragrance of the horizon is made sweet, and how offering-bread is established.

Remember how (ritual) regulations are adhered to, how (religious) dates are distributed, how (5) one who has been inducted into priestly service may be removed for personal weakness - that is, it was carried out wrongfully. ...

... It shall come that he brings coolness upon the heart.

(xii 1) Men shall say: "He is the herdsman of all men. Evil is not in his heart. Though his herds may be small, still he has spent the day caring for them."...⁵⁸

A similar recourse to words imposes itself in the case of another literary piece, now dubbed *The Protests of the Eloquent Peasant*. In that piece, one is presented with the tale of the honest peasant, Hunanup, who is unjustly robbed of his goods and his ass by the local official, Dehuti-Necht, while on the way to market. The official schemes to entrap the farmer under a legal pretense and seize his belongings. When Hunanup protests, the official beats him savagely, and Hunanup makes recourse to the court of the official's superior, chief steward Meruitensi, thereupon to implore for justice and the restoration of his possessions. At first, the aggrieved peasant addresses the chief steward through an intermediary, who cynically reports:

"Lord, it is presumably a case of one of your peasants who has gone against another peasant near him. Behold, it is customary with peasants to so conduct themselves toward others who are near them. Shall we beat Dehuti-Necht for a little natron and a little salt? Command him to restore it and he will restore it."

The steward makes no reply, and Hunanup finally presents himself in person before Meruitensi, and there entreats him, in a lengthy speech, to remember his station as a mediator of *maat*:

"Chief steward, my lord, you are greatest of the great, you are guide of all that which is not and which is. When you embark on the sea of truth, that you may go sailing upon it, then shall not the ////////////// strip away your sail, then your ship shall not remain fast, then shall no misfortune happen to your mast then shall your spars not be broken, then shall you not be stranded - if you run fast aground, the waves shall not break upon you, then you shall not taste the impurities of the river, then you shall not behold the face of fear, the shy fish shall come to you, and you shall capture the fat birds. For you are the father of the orphan, the husband of the widow, the brother of the desolate, the garment of the motherless. Let me place your name in this land higher than all good laws: you guide without avarice, you great one free from meanness, who destroys deceit, who creates truthfulness. Throw the evil to the

58 From Pritchard, James B; *Ancient Near Eastern Texts* (henceforth: *ANET*,); p.441.

*ground. I will speak hear me. Do justice, O you praised one, whom the praised ones praise. Remove my oppression: behold, I have a heavy weight to carry; behold, I am troubled of soul; examine me, I am in sorrow."*⁵⁹

So impressed is Meruitensi with the suppliant's eloquence, that he sends word to the king Nebkaure (c. Dynasty IX/X, c.2160-2040), who instructs his representative to keep silent, in order that the peasant will continue to appear at court to plead his case. Meruitensi, in the meantime, is to render no judgment, nor utter a word. Rather, he is to see to the necessities of the peasant, and his far-off family, in secret, and record his subsequent speeches before passing them on to the king. Many days follow, over the course of which Hunanup makes eight more speeches in which he cajoles the steward to remember his duties to set *maat* in the land and to despise *isfet*, pleading with him to break his silence. With the ninth speech, and with justice denied, the farmer vows to take matters into his own hands -- he will storm out of court, and slay himself on Meruitensi's doorstep. Thereupon, having traveled into the West under his own power, he will appeal to the gods themselves. Having taken the game far enough, however, the steward orders two of his guards to bring the peasant back, and entreats the aggrieved man to become a guest in his house. He then sends word to the king, along with the recorded speeches. Nebkaure found the speeches "*more pleasing to his heart than anything which was in his entire land*", and ordered his representative to render a verdict. At that point, Meruitensi issues orders for all of Dehuti-Necht's property and possessions to be seized and transferred to the ownership of the much vexed Hunanup.

What, on first inspection, appears as quaint, homespun tale of a peasant's triumph over his supposed betters reveals itself as something quite different when read from within the semantic web of early Egyptian symbolism. Firstly, one must consider the tacit connivance of King Nebkaure in the local corruption, represented

⁵⁹ From *ANET*, p. 407-410.

by Dehuti-Necht. Rather than bringing a swift end to an affair which mocks the god's *maat*, the god himself extends Hunanup's problems for his own amusement. This is far from being a "typical" story of corruption and power, which is meant to inspire a knowing audience to cluck their tongues. The king, insofar as he is the manifest god of both power and spirit, is acting in a very a-typical manner for an Egyptian pharaoh; instead of ensuring the proper reflection of *maat* to every corner of the realm, Nebkaure rather allows *isfet* to continue for rather dubious reasons. Insofar as every representative of the king, at this stage of Egyptian order, should reflect his majesty as the mediator of the quaternarian cosmic order, the very fact that Dehuti-Necht corruption of that order is not dealt with promptly only suggests that his corruption is actually an accurate reflection of the head which wears the crown.

Secondly, one must be cognizant of the significance which the Egyptian myth placed upon silence, and thus the symbolic significance of the Silent Man in Egyptian culture. As Frankfort demonstrates in his seminal monograph, *Ancient Egyptian Religion*, a large literature of Egyptian formal, ethical, and religious advice circulated around that paradigmatic figure. Quoting from a selection of such "wisdom literature", he remarks:

*"But it was not only ignorance that threatened to lead man astray [in the Egyptian conception]. His passionate nature presented as great a danger. The Egyptian was well acquainted with the whole range of the seven deadly sins. Hence the "teaching" distinguish two temperaments: the 'passionate man' and the self-disciplined, the so-called 'silent man'. The passionate man is garrulous, quarrelsome, grasping, arbitrary, overweening. The silent man is patient, modest, calm, up to a point self-effacing, but above all master of himself under all circumstances."*⁶⁰

Lest, though, the silent man of the Egyptian paradigm be confused with the figure of humility of the Christian experience, Frankfort quotes one passage in

⁶⁰ See Frankfort, Henri; *Ancient Egyptian Religion*; p.65-66.

particular which compares the silent man to the silent, and much feared Nile crocodile. Silence, for the ancient Egyptian, indicated self-control, education, patience, and an attunement with the divine order (*maat*). When speech became necessary, the silent man's words should render *maat* plain, and not reflect a garrulous busybodiedness. In essence, by reflecting *maat*, the words of the silent man take on a sacred character. Comparing, then, that paradigmatic figure to the silence of Meruitensi and King Nebkaure is suggestive. This is particularly so when one compares those two figure to the verbose eloquence of the peasant Hunanup, who pleads for *maat*. Here then, the audience is presented with the odd situation in which the proper roles and expressions of Egyptian order have turned upside down. It is not the king, but the peasant who struggles to "shine forth" (*khay*) *maat*, and must do so through a litany of words which is long enough to fill several papyri. In the end, though, it seems as if the rulers are only moved to act in the interests of order, piety, law, and justice (collectively *maat*) by Hunanup's dire threat to take the case directly, and immediately, to the gods in the hereafter.

With the breakdown of pharaonic order, matters of *maat* were symbolically expressed as increasingly being of interest only to those whom felt themselves incapable of insuring it -- figures such as Ipu-Wer and Hunanup. As both Voegelin and Wilson point out, the lack of divine guidance and mediation from the king did not result in a radical break with the cosmological form of the myth. The disorientated existence of the First Intermediate Period did not result in a noetic quest for true existence as it did in Hellas, nor find reprise in something like the pneumatic experience of the Thornbush Episode, as it did within Israel. Rather, the Egyptian experience continued to identify the limits and possibilities of existence in accordance with the ground, with the pragmatic circumstances of the cosmological empire. As a result, the peculiar Egyptian response to existential disorder took the form of an appeal to the king to "remember" his former role, which amounted to an

appeal for Horus to repeal history, and return Egypt to the myth -- to return the divided Two Lands to their Beginning and resume his role as the mediator of the Beyond.

§3. The King as Son of God and Savior

The collapse of the pharaonic mediation of divine order, which proceeded with the collapse of Dynasty VI, neither resulted in a similar collapse of the cosmological myth, nor culminated in a radical transfiguration of the symbolization and institutionalization of the cosmocentric experience. Though existence was sensed to be both disordered and unorderable under the one-hundred and fifty year interregnum, the cosmos itself did not become “profane” in the absence of an effective king. Neither did any pronounced effort seem to have arisen to re-found existence by an unseen measure beyond the cosmological gods and their divine mediator. The events of the First Intermediate Period issued forth neither a Plato, nor an Isaiah. Rather, the Egyptian response to disorder was to reinterpret the symbols of the myth. This occurred even as a human cry went out for Pharaoh, some Pharaoh, to resume the role of mediator of divine cosmic order. In chapter 2 we shall reflect upon the common appropriation of the royal mortuary cult of Osiris as one response to the existential turmoil of the age. At present, we shall examine how the symbolization of the king and the king’s role came to reflect an increasing emphasis on their status as son of god, rather than god, and as savior, rather than creator. In essence, in the wake of the First Intermediate Period, and with increasing intensity following the Second and Third, the very effectiveness of the king in bringing about *maat* became a criteria for the formerly unthinkable -- judging the god.

The restoration of centralized, pharaonic rule under Mentuhotep I (c.2066-2040), and his immediate successors down to Amenhemet I (c.1991-1962) did not consign the experiences of the preceding time of troubles to an imaginative oblivion. Quite to the contrary, for, there is much indication that literate and high-ranking members of Egyptian society, at the very least, preserved memory of the disaster, and contributed thereby to the reconsideration of key details of the cosmological order. The *Instructions of King Merikare*, which are addressed to the king's son, stand as a striking example. The document begins in a rather pragmatic tone, with the king offering advice as to how one should secure rule:

A talker is a mischief-maker, suppress him, kill [him], erase his name, [destroy] his kinsfolk, suppress the remembrance of him and his partisans who love him.

A violent man is a confuser of the citizens who always makes partisans of the younger generation. If now you find someone belonging to the citizenry [///] and his deeds have passed beyond you, accuse him before the entourage and suppress [him], for he is a rebel indeed; a talker is a mischief-maker. Bend the multitude and drive out hot temper from it; [///] will not rise [in] rebellion by means of the poor man when he is made to rebel.

Then, on the heels of a great deal of less sanguine advice regarding court politics and the avoidance of covetousness, matters take a decidedly apologetic turn:

The kingship is a goodly office; it has no son and it has no brother who shall make its monuments endure, yet it is the one person who ennobles the other; a man works for his predecessor, through the desire that what he has done may be embellished by another who shall come after him. A mean act was committed in my reign; the territory of Thinis was devastated. It indeed happened, but not through what I had done; I knew of it only after it was done. See, the consequences exceeded what I had done, for what is damaged is spoiled, and there is no benefit for him who restores what he (himself) has ruined, who demolishes what he has built and embellished what he has defaced; beware of it! A blow is repaid by the like of it, and all that is achieved is a hitting.⁶¹

⁶¹ Translation by R. O. Faulkner, William Kelly Simpson (ed.), *The Literature of Ancient Egypt*, New Haven and London, 1973, p. 180-192.

From these two passages one might make three reflections. First, one should observe that the pragmatic status of the kingship has clearly fallen precipitously in Merikare's time if "talkers" need be handled with bloody-handed suspicion; indeed, the paradigmatic "Quiet Man" effectively becomes the man of discretion. Secondly, however, one detects an odd dulling in the king's aura, which is reflected in his apologetic reference to unfortunate incidents undertaken by his subordinates. One recalls to mind the haranguing of Ipu-Wer and wonders as to the degree to which the Great God had already suffered a loss of prestige. Thirdly, though, one is faced with the fact that the letter was not a unique copy, which was preserved by some quirk of fate. Rather, the existent copy dates from Dynasty XVIII, approximately seven-hundred years after the narrated events. Furthermore, the extant copy is not only separated from the original by the entire span of the Middle Kingdom, but by the Second Intermediate Period as well. The memory of the breakdown of pharaonic order survived the restoration of central rule by deliberate acts of preservation. One may thus already speak of an Egyptian experience of history in Voegelin's sense of a history of order -- of a memory or experience of sequential periods in time which are seen to express meaningful differences as periods of relative order and disorder. In the context of the cosmological myth of the anonymous 15th-century B.C. copyist, *The Instructions of King Merikare* would likely have carried, at the very least, the meaning of two periods of *maat*, followed by two eras of *isfet*, preceded only by a Beginning, and issuing into a third restoration of *maat* in the author's present under the rulers of Dynasty XVIII.

The significance of the king in the order of Egypt did not simply diminish, however, though it may be tempting to posit as much. The centrality of the king in even such late documents as the metastatic *Potter's Oracle*, itself first composed in the late Ptolemaic Era, belies such facile assumptions. That the king played the role of the creator of *maat* and the mediator of true existence, right down to the end of the

cosmological order, rather suggests something else. That is, that one must look elsewhere to determine the means by which the preserved memory of the vicissitudes of order and time was incorporated into the myth.

What suggests itself from the sources is not a simple diminishment of the king's status, but rather a re-conceptualization of Pharaoh's symbolic significance and institutional position within the cosmic order of the empire. With later dynasties, particularly those which followed the second restoration, centrality of divine agency has markedly shifted away from the king, to the Theban creator-god, Amon:

(I) ... (The god Amon) -- he is my father, and I am his son, He commanded to me that I should be upon his throne, while I was (still) a nestling. He begot me from the (very) middle of [his] heart [and chose me for the kingship... The is no lie], there is no equivocation therein -- when my majesty was (only a puppy, when I was (only a newly) weaned child who was in his temple, before my installation as prophet had taken place...

...[He opened for] me the doors of heaven; he spread open for me the portals of its horizon. I flew up to the sky as a divine falcon, that I might see his mysterious form which is in heaven, that I might adore his majesty. (10) ...I saw the forms of being of the Horizon God on his mysterious ways in heaven.

Re himself established me, and I was endowed with [his] crowns [which] were upon his head, his uraeus-serpent was fixed upon [my brow]...I [was equipped] with the understanding of the gods, like Horus when he took account of himself at the house of his father Amon-Re. I was [perfected] with the dignities of a god... [He established] my crowns, and drew up for me my titular myself...

...He made all foreign countries [come] bowing down to the fame of my majesty. Terror of me is in the hearts of the Nine Bows; all lands are under my sandals. He has given victory through the work of my hands, to extend [the frontiers of Egypt]... He is rejoicing in me more than (in) any (other) king who has been in the land since it was (first) set apart

I am his son, the beloved of his majesty. What I shall do is what his ka may desire. I bring forward this land to the place where he is. ⁶²

Here, the king is no longer the creator-god who emerges from the primordial isle of flame, as in Utterance 249 of the Pyramid Texts⁶³. Nor does the king figure as the co-creator who brings order to creation by mediating the intracosmic divinities, society, and man, as in the Memphite Theology. Instead of the figure of the Great God and creator, the reader is presented with that of the Son of God, who was begotten in the heart of Amon. We find a similar proclamation of divine parentage in the inscriptions of Queen Hatshepsut, whose authority to rule, even faced with the rival Thutmose III⁶⁴, seems to have lain exclusively in the official recognition of her as the “son” of the god by the powerful cult of Amon in Thebes:

Instructions of Amend

200. Utterance of Amon, presider over Karnak: “GO, to make her, together with her ka, from these limbs which are in me; go, to fashion her better than all gods; rshape for me, le **this** my daughter, whom I have begotten. I have given to her all life and satisfaction, all stability, all joy of heart from me, all offerings, and **all** bread, like Re, forever.”

Reply of Khnum

201. “I will form this [thy] daughter [Makere] (Hatshepsut); for love of the beautiful. Her form shall be more exalted than the gods, in her life, prosperity and health; for offerings mistress. great dignity of King of Upper and Lower Egypt.” ⁶⁵

62 From *ANET*, p.446-447.

63 The Isle of Flame is represented in the cosmogonic myth of Heliopolis to be the place from which the sun-god first arose to create the Land, and it is this association which is extended to the king in the Pyramid Text. To quote from Mercer, p.76:

“265: N. is this (flower) at the nose of the Great Mighty One.

N. has come out of the Isle of Fire, after he has placed Truth there in the place of Falsehood.

N. is the guardian of washing, who watches over the Uraei on that night of the Great Flood which comes out of the Great One (sky).

266: N. appears as Nefertum, the lotus at the nose of Re, as he comes out of the Horizon (Ax.t) every day, and at the sight of which the gods purify themselves.”

64 For a period of time, Queen Hatshepsut and Thutmose III seem to have been co-rulers of a sort, with the Queen taking on the role of king of the empire, and the younger man taking on the task of commanding the Egyptian expeditions against Asia. With Hatshepsut’s death, the kingship fell to Thutmose.

65 From Breasted, James Henry; *Ancient Records of Egypt*, v.2; §200-201.

Indeed, the significance of the myth of the king as the chosen son of god retained enough currency to have been of use to Alexander the Great nearly twelve-hundred years later⁶⁶. The new conceptualization of the king as creature rather than creator, and as servant of the god rather than equal, also came to be reflected in the epithet "the Good God", which came to supplant "the Great God" early in the Middle Kingdom. More importantly, the repositioning of the king in the semantic web of ancient Egypt reflected a shift in the experience of the ground of cosmic order. As such texts as the *Admonitions of Ipu-Wer*, *The Instructions of King Merikare*, and *A Dispute Over Suicide* exemplify, the downfall of the house of the king and the resulting unrest, rendered it impossible to conceive him or her as the bringer, creator, defender, and perfecter of the cosmos. When the king's *hu* had been experienced as bringing disorder and disaster, the response was to simultaneously search for a "true" king, as well as to search for that ground of ordered existence by which the ruler was to be measured, all the while attempting to explain the mystery of kings who bring *isfet*. One remarkable Coffin Text from the Middle Kingdom reflects the new found search:

The All-Lord says in the presence of those stilled from the tumult on the journey to the court: "Pray, be prosperous in peace! I repeat for you four good deeds which my own heart did for me in the midst of the serpent-coil, in order to still evil. I did four good deeds within the portal of the horizon.

"I made the four winds that every man might breathe thereof like his fellow in his time. That is (one) deed thereof.

"I made the great inundation that the poor man might have rights therein like the great man. That is (one) deed thereof.

⁶⁶ In 332/331, having defeated the Persian King Darius III at the Battle of Issus in 333 and taken control of Asia Minor, Syria, and then Egypt, Alexander made a sojourn to the Oracle of Amon in Siwah (itself located in Libya). There, the oracle reportedly confirmed the young conqueror's kinship as the son of the god, thereby allowing him to step into the role of Pharaoh. See Arrian; *Anabasis Alexandri*; III.3-4.

"I made every man like his fellow. I did not command that they do evil, (but) it was their hearts which violated what I had said. That is (one) deed thereof.

"I made their hearts cease from forgetting the West, in order that divine offerings might be given to the gods of the nomes. That is (one) deed thereof.

"I brought into being the four gods from my sweat, while men are the tears of my eye." -- All Men Created Equal in Opportunity, ⁶⁷

The text is tantalizingly suggestive of both the experiential problems of the Egyptian cosmological order, and of their symbolization within the context of the myth. Embedded within the formulation is the salient theodicy message -- that all men have been created equal, and that it is the hearts of men which do evil (*isfet*), not the god who commands it. While the Coffin Text itself cannot be demonstrated to have been in general circulation, it would seem to capture the larger trend in a few words. That is to say that *maat* came to be seen as the creation of the highest god in a Beginning, preceding its installation in society, and that *isfet* was introduced by the hearts of men. The suggestive inferences towards the failures of kings are present with possibility, but never reach explicitness. When, much later, under the Achaemenids and then the Ptolemies, revolts break-out against the king for the first time, the justification and purpose of the act does not stretch towards the goal of abolishing kingship as a profane office. Rather, the purpose would prove to entail the fulfillment of that sacred and sacerdotal station. The flash-point of revolt would invariably originate in the perceived failure of the king to mediate the divine, intracosmic flow of the gods through the maintenance of temples, sacred spaces, animals and offices, and the proper performance of rituals⁶⁸. The king, in other words, would hold responsibility for staving off what had not been experienced as

⁶⁷ From ANET, p.7

⁶⁸ For more on the centrality of the king in the ritual mediation of the cosmos, see Frankfort, Henri; *Ancient Egyptian Religion*; p.102-106; Frankfort, Henri; *Kingship and the Gods*; p.53-60, 67-69; Assmann, Jan; *The Search for God in Ancient Egypt*; p.119-123; Assmann, Jan; *The Mind of Egypt*; p.57-61, 73, 75-77.

possible before the intervention of three collapses of the pharaonic order -- the disenchantment of the Land and its abandonment by the gods.

The subtle re-conceptualization of *maat* as the creation of the highest god, rather than the king as Horus, did not alter the fundamental understanding of true existence as an attunement within the cosmos of gods. The relocation of *maat* with the creator-god -- be it Amon, Re, Ptah, Khnum, or so forth -- did not ever suggest that the ground of existence itself transcended cosmic reality. This was the case for the simple reason that the Egyptian creator-gods themselves did not transcend the sensual reality of the cosmos. Rather, the creative acts at the Beginning were always expressed as acts of begetting which brought the primeval oneness into a plenitude of divine forms⁶⁹. The creator-god, by this reckoning, is merely the mysterious entity which begets itself from the primordial soup, begat multiplicity from oneness, and brought multiplicity to order through either direct or indirect activity.

The demiurgic god of the Egyptian myth could thus only ever be the judge of immanent existence in terms of its conformance to cosmic order. It could not, like the God of Israel, the Buddhas and bodddhisatvas of Buddhism, the Brahma gods of India, or the Platonic Agathon, issue a call for existence which transcended the demands of the cosmos. Thus, the lowering of the rank of the king, relative to that of an Egyptian demiurge, could not and did not fundamentally represent a break with the cosmological myth in favour of an anthropological or soteriological order. To explicitly employ Voegelin's insights, one would have to say that the position of the Beyond in the experience, symbolization, and institutionalization of Egyptian order was absorbed into the figure of the demiurgic creator-god and his Ennead (nine-member pantheon of primary gods). Thus, what arose was a stratified hierarchy of reality, with the "truer" reality of the gods becoming ever more remote with each

⁶⁹ See *ANET*; p. 3-6, for instance, for two different variations of the Egyptian cosmogony respectively headed by Atum of Heliopolis and Ptah of Memphis.

experience of cosmic disorder, and the anxious inability of Egyptians to actualize and to maintain *maat*.

In practical terms, anxiety over a cosmic existence which was less than cosmic -- let alone paradigmatic -- actually increased both the prestige and the responsibility of the king in the new capacity of savior. The *Prophecy of Neferrohu*, written sometime in Dynasty XVIII, is particularly florid in its description of all the ills which the savior king will overcome:

This land is helter-skelter, and no one knows the result which will come about, which is hidden from speech, sight, or hearing. The face is deaf, for silence confronts. I show thee the land topsy-turvy. That which never happened has happened. Men will take up weapons of warfare, (so that) the land lives in (40) confusion. Men will make arrows of metal, beg for the bread of blood, and laugh with the laughter of sickness. There is no one who weeps because of death; there is no one who spends the night fasting because of death; (but) a man's heart pursues himself (alone). (Disheveled) mourning is no (longer) carried out today, (for) the heart is completely separated from it. A man sits in his corner, (turning) his back while one man kills another. I show thee the son as a foe, the brother as an enemy, and a man (45) killing his (own) father...

...(Then) it is that a king will come belonging to the south, Ameni, the triumphant, his name. He is the son of a woman of the land of Nubia; he is one born in Upper Egypt.¹⁶ He will take the [white] crown; he will wear the red crown; (60) he will unite the Two Mighty Ones;¹⁷ he will satisfy the Two Lords¹⁸ with what they desire. The encircler-of-the-fields (will be) in his grasp, the oar...

Rejoice, ye people of his time! The son of a man will make his name forever and ever. They who incline toward evil and who plot rebellion have subdued their speech for fear of him. The Asiatics will fall to his sword, and the Libyans will fall to his flame. The rebels belong to his wrath, and the treacherous of heart to (65) the awe of him. The uraeus-serpent which is on his brow stills for him the treacherous of heart.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ From *ANET*, p.444

Similarly, the aforementioned *Potter's Oracle* arises in the latter half (c.130-116) of the Ptolemaic Dynasty, long after Graeco-Macedonian rule had lost its luster. By that time, the Lagids had fallen to squabbling amongst themselves and ignoring their kingly duties to the cosmic order -- even as they continued to campaign against the rival ecumenic empires of the Selucids, the Attalids, and Rome:

... and lawless. The river will flow without enough water, with insufficient, so that the land ... will be inflamed, but against nature. For in the time of the Typhonians they will say: "Wretched Egypt, you are wronged by terrible iniquities wrought against you."

The sun will be darkened, not wishing to look upon the evil things in Egypt. The land will not welcome the sowing of the seed. These ... will be blasted by the wind. And the farmer did not sow on account of this, but tribute will be required of him. They are fighting in Egypt because of the lack of nourishment. What they till, another reaps and takes away.

In this generation there will be war and murder which will destroy brothers, and husbands and wives. For these things will come to pass when the great god Hephaistos wishes to return to the city, and the Girdle-wearers, being Typhonians, will destroy themselves ... evil will be wrought. He will go on foot to the sea in wrath, and will trample on many of them because of their impiety. And out of Syria will come he who will be hateful to all men, and being ... he will come from Ethiopia ... and from the realms of the impious into Egypt and he will be established in the city which will later be laid waste.

And for two years our ... well ... The month of Amon and he said well. Their children will be defeated. And the land will be unsettled and not a few of those dwelling in Egypt will abandon their own land and go to a foreign place. Friends will murder friends. There will be weeping and their ills will be worse than those of the others. And men will perish at each others hands. Two of their number will pass on to the same place(?) because of the one help. Much death will fall upon pregnant women.

The Girdle-wearers being Typhonians are destroying ... And then Agathos Daimon will abandon the city being established and will enter Memphis, and the foreign city which will be built will be emptied. And these things will take place at the conclusion of the evils when the falling of the leaves occurs in the Egypt of the foreigners. The

city of the Girdle-wearers will be laid waste as in my furnace, because of the unlawful deeds which they executed in Egypt.

The statues transferred there will return to Egypt. The city by the sea will become a drying place for fishermen because Agathos Daimon and Knephis will have gone to Memphis, so that some who pass through will say: "This city, in which every race of men dwelt, was all-nourishing."

And then Egypt will increase, when for fifty-five years he who is well disposed, the king the dispenser of good, born of the Sun, established by the great goddess Isis, is at hand, so that those surviving will pray for the resurrection of those who died before, in order that they might share in the good things. At the end of these things trees will bear leaves and the forsaken Nile will be filled with water, and the winter having been stripped of its natural dress, will run its own cycle. And then the summer will take its own course, and the winds shall be well-ordered and gently diminished.

For in the time of the Typhonians the sun was darkened, having shone forth on evil customs and having exhibited the poverty of the Girdle-wearers. And Egypt ... having spoken up to this point he (the potter) fell silent. / King Amenophis, distressed by the many disasters he had recounted, gave burial to the potter at Heliopolis, deposited the book in the sacred archives there, and revealed it unstintingly to all men. Speech of the potter / to King Amenophis, (translated) as far as possible. Concerning [future] events in Egypt.⁷¹

Here, quite amazingly, one is presented with a prophecy which is not merely florid in its expectations for a return to true order, but positively metastatic in its expectation of a wholesale transfiguration of the cosmos. The girdle-wearing Typhonians -- the Hellenes -- will first and foremost be destroyed, as will be Alexandria, their hated "city by the sea". The gods of Alexandria will have abandoned it in the meanwhile, for the more respectable city of Memphis -- the home city of Ptah and the site of the formal "creation" of the Two Lands under the legendary Menes. The savior-king, son of god, having been established on his throne (a manifestation of Isis, if we recall), the cosmos will be set right and will give bounty like never before. The sun shall shine more brightly, the Nile will be filled, and the earth will give its gifts without reservation. Most conspicuous in its

⁷¹ From Austin, Michel; *The Hellenistic World from Alexander to the Roman Conquest*; §326

absence, however, is any mention of the foreign empires nipping at the Land's borders -- particularly Rome.

The mysterious muteness on the clear and present pragmatic dangers of the age is, however, made verbose by the symbolism. "Thyphon", in this instance, is the Hellenized name of the Egyptian god Seth, the rival of Horus. By the time of the New Kingdom, Seth had come to be seen not as the manifester of power and might within the cosmos of Egypt, who had submitted to the rule of Horus' law (*maat*). Rather, the god had come to be identified with the aggressive, lawless (*maat*-less) forces of Asia -- the lands beyond the Red Desert⁷². As such, foreign lands were recognized to subsist within a meaningful relationship to the cosmos, rather than to be a manifestation of meaningless chaos across the periphery of the horizon. The world outside of the Black Land and the Red Desert was thereby brought within the horizon of Egyptian consciousness, but only in the capacity of an obnoxious aggressor.

Within the narrative of the *Potter's Oracle*, the "Typhonians" stand-in both as symbols of the obnoxious foreigner then currently disrupting the Land, but also for all such elements, past and present, with the expanded Egyptian horizon. The text, therefore, anticipates the savior god to not simply drive the local Greeks into extinction, but all of the "Typhonians", the people of Seth, within the sun's horizon. By implication, at the end of this business, the world will be left to the followers of Horus and *maat*. Indeed, one senses that, having tasted the disappointments of the rise and fall of cosmic order in time, that the authors of the oracle have elected for an imaginative leap out of history, into an End which mirrors the Beginning, and which makes manifest the Beyond -- the god's *maat* -- on Earth and for good.

⁷² See Assmann, Jan; *The Mind of Egypt*; p.198-200.

Chapter 3 - Death

§1. Death and the Immanent Order

"What my soul said to me: "Cast complaint upon the peg, my comrade and brother; make offering on the brazier and cleave to life, according as I have said. Desire me here, thrust the West aside, but desire that you may attain the West when your body goes to earth, that I may alight after you are weary; then will we make an abode together." – A Dispute Over Suicide⁷³

To say that the Egyptian experience and symbolization of the human personality was complicated, would be to commit to an enormous understatement. In the modern, post-Cartesian experience, personality is most often spoken of in terms of either dualist symbols (i.e. mind-body, body-soul), materialistic monads (i.e. personality as the expression of biology or of one's material constitution, in the manner argued by Dawkins or Hobbes), or, at the periphery, triads derived directly or indirectly from the classical experience (i.e. Freud's trinity of ego, superego, and id; Platonic and neo-Platonic distinctions between the passions, spirit, and reason; gnostic divisions of body, soul, spirit). With appropriate caution, one might rightly speak of the modern, Western debate regarding the personality as primarily centered around either the development or the liberation of the "self" or "I". In such discourse, the personality is typically conceived to either holistically develop out of the primordial givens of existence, or to liberate itself from those givens. Thus, underlying the Western debate on the personality and its mode of expression lies the debate as to whether its development proceeds from the proper ordering of existence according to the exigencies of the immanent cosmos, or to cosmos-transcending demands. As such, the Western discourse itself entails discourse as to the definition of that which is immanent, as opposed to that which transcends, and which implicitly opposes the present order of the cosmos to a world-transcendent - and thus extra-temporal - force, spirit, or Person.

⁷³ Translated by R.O. Faulkner in W. K. Simpson, ed.; *The Literature of Ancient Egypt*; New Haven & London, 1973, pp. 201-209.

The ancient Egyptian experience of the personality does not easily conform to modern expectations even upon a first glance, and forcing that experience through the accepted, modern categories easily introduces distortions. Indeed, from early times, the fundamental symbols denoting the personality within the Egyptian myth seem to have been six-fold, rather than the minimal one or maximum three which remain familiar to the West. As recorded both in the early tombs of the Old Kingdom, and within the Coffin Texts of later eras, the living, human person was conceived as an assemblage of *khat* ("body"), *jb* ("heart"), *ka* ("life-creating force" or "vital essence"), *shut* ("shadow"), *rn* ("name"), and *ba* ("manifestation"). All six were seen as indispensable members of personal life. Moreover, and from an equally early era, the maintenance of those six members of one's personality in some form of enduring, albeit transfigured, relationship was seen as a requisite of existence, or at least effective existence, after death.

The difficulties of this thoroughly alien experience of the person have often been compounded in the writings of Egyptologists, who have often attempted a word for word translation of Egyptian symbols into the familiar semantics of modern languages. This has, at times, led to some obvious confusions, as when, for instance, both *ba* and *ka* have been generically translated as "soul" -- as seems to frequently occur even in the standard translations of Wilson and Mercer. This results in a rather distinct loss of fine distinctions and subtleties suggested by the ancient texts themselves. That difficulty, however, is often easily surmounted by simply transliterating, rather than translating, such problematic symbols -- as demonstrated in the works of such scholars as R.O. Faulkner. A more difficult problem is posed by the simple lack of anything like a semiotic map, which might be employed to associate the Egyptian symbols with comparable Western symbols of similar meaning. In most cases, save perhaps *jb* and *khat*, no such comparable, meaningful

terms seem to be available⁷⁴. As a consequence, any attempt at understanding the Egyptian experience of death must begin with an exegesis of the Egyptian symbols of personality, and their interpenetration with the institutions of the cosmological order.

Towards that end, the interpretive work of Henri Frankfort has proven particularly valuable. With regards to the perception of person-hood in ancient Egypt, Frankfort first drew attention to the distinction between the person of the king, and that of other inhabitants of the Two Lands. For one, it should be recalled that, from the beginning, the king was understood to be, not a secular ruler, nor *primus inter pares*, nor a representative of a higher power, but the *ba* ("manifestation") of the god Horus, and the son of Osiris. Even as, in later eras, the king's symbolic significance as the son of Amon-Re began to supplant the older symbolism, the old status of Pharaoh as Horus incarnate persisted alongside the newly emphasized status as the divine son of the creator. To speak of the "soul" of Pharaoh is thus highly challenging, even anachronistic, given the king's status as a particular manifestation of a higher being. In a significant sense, the king had no "soul" or "self" in any manner which would make sense to a modern. This was so simply because any individuality of a particular king was, for millennia, largely subsumed into the divine order of the gods and cosmos in both life and death. In life, the king was Horus. In death, the king became Osiris. For nearly two millennia, the compactness of the myth simply defied the recognition of any meaningful individuality among the ranks of kings. Only with the moderate differentiation of the myth, which transpired after the assaults of cosmic disorder, would the king become a "person" -- a creature of the god with particular foibles and a relatively independent existence.

⁷⁴ As this author is only familiar with modern English and French, it would be unseemly to speak on behalf of all modern, Western languages.

Matters were quite different with regards to the other occupants of the Nile Valley. Whereas, in the case of the king, one must speak of the *ba* of a god, in the case of the average Egyptian, one must speak of their *ba*'s. In other words, the typical Egyptian was understood to be, not a manifestation, but rather one who manifests. To make the distinction in another manner, whereas the living king is *of* Horus, the *ba* of Ipu-Wer is *of* Ipu-Wer. In an odd way, the typical Egyptian peasant could legitimately be said to be more of an individual than the king.

This contrast between the relative individuality of the commoner versus that of the king, was also reflected in the description of that other major component of the personality, the *ka*, which we've chosen the translation "vital essence". The *ka* of the king, unlike that of other occupants of the Land, was not simply the vital force which animated a particular body. The *ka* of the king, much like the king him or herself, was an expression of the divine plenitude of the cosmos. As the focal point of the mediation between the cosmic divinities and their creative presence, the king's *ka* was perceived to partake of the very essence of natural phenomena. The king's activity brought about the vital Nile floods, but could also, as one learns from the *Admonitions of Ipu-Wer*, the king could withhold all vitality, and leave the Land to waste⁷⁵. The king's *ka*, moreover, was directly responsible for the strength or weakness of the *ka*'s of the common folk. For, the "vital essence" of a mortal Egyptian was seen as, for all intents, the life force of the personality, and directly tied to the provisioning and maintenance of life's vitality through the consumption of sustenance. Sustenance, in the cosmological understanding of Egypt, was a sacred expression of the gods, alongside the rest of the cosmos, and one which was provisioned through the *ka* of the king as sacred mediator⁷⁶. The connection of the

⁷⁵ We may perceive parallels between the myth of the vitality of the king of Egypt, and that of the ancient Celtic kings of England and Ireland. One recalls to mind the myth of King Arthur, whose absence from the land, and melancholy, was said to have caused the whole of the kingdom to grow barren. The mythological identification of the vitality of the king with that of the land is thus far from being an Egyptian peculiarity.

⁷⁶ See Frankfort; *Ancient Egyptian Religion*, p.91, and Frankfort; *Kingship and the Gods*, p.68-69.

living *ka* of the commoner to that of the living Horus need not be so indirect, however. In many places in the personal dedications, letters, and biographical materials of Egyptians, reference is made to the king "making a man's *ka*"⁷⁷. The king, it seems, could intervene directly in the *ka*'s of living subjects, and correct defects and deficiencies which prevented the effective expression of their vitality and fortune in the cosmic order.

Similar distinctions persist with regards to the *ka*'s of the dead. While the *ka* of the commoner, much like the *ba*, dissociated from the other members of the personality in death, matters were more complex in the case of the deceased king. For, while the living king of the Old Kingdom was, first and foremost, the incarnation of Horus, in death, the king became Osiris, father of Horus (the living king), and king of the underworld:

134a. O N., thou didst not depart dead; thou didst depart living,

134b. (so) thou sittest upon the throne of Osiris, thy 'b-*ꜥ*-sceptre in thy hand, thou commandest the living;

134c. (thy) *mkꜥ*-sceptre and thy *nꜥb.t*-sceptre in thy hand, commanding those of secret places.

135a. Thine arm is like that of Atum; thy shoulders are like those of Atum; thy body is like that of Atum; thy back is like that of Atum;

135b. thy seat is like that of Atum; thy legs are like those of Atum; thy face is like that of Anubis.

135c. Thou travelest over the regions of Horus; thou travelest over the regions of Set (or, the regions of Horus serve thee; the regions of Set serve thee).⁷⁸

While the dead king departs, with his *ka*, to the underworld, his corpse/mummy remains behind as the manifestation-vessel of himself, in much the

⁷⁷ See Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods*, p.68.

⁷⁸ From Mercer, p.58-59, Utterance 213

same capacity as a cult statue⁷⁹. The king's *ka*, however, derives neither from Horus nor Osiris, but is the primeval creator, the sun-god:

136a. O N., beware of the ocean (sea?). To say four times.

136b. The messengers of thy *ka* are come for thee; the messengers of thy father are come for thee; the messengers of Rē' are come for thee.

137a. Go after (pursue) thy sun (days); purify thyself,

137b. (for) thy bones are (those of) female-falcons, goddesses, who are in heaven,

137c. that thou mayest be at the side of the god; that thou mayest leave thy house to thy son

137d. who is thine heir...⁸⁰

The vital power of the king, living or dead, flowed directly from the demiurgic power of the Sun, from or near the Beginning. The common *ka*, by way of contrast, can claim no such origin or plenitude. In death, as in life, the common *ka* must be provisioned in order to remain effective and capable of succoring one's person-hood:

*Ferrying the forebears in very beautiful peace,
setting out for the hills of the necropolis;
grasping the hand of the fathers, namely his kas,
each (of them) a provisioned one;
bringing an offering to him above the shaft
in his house of eternity.*⁸¹

Moreover, the common *ka*, as we have seen indicated in the *Admonitions*, was an individual creation of the potter-god Khepri, and was thus seen as of recent, temporal origin, and both particular and individual. Contrary, perhaps, to modern expectations, this relative expression of individuality was not experienced as an unqualified good. There is generally very little indication of an unreserved celebration of individual personality in Egyptian epigraphic records. In the

⁷⁹ See Assmann, Jan; *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt* (ed. David Linton); Cornell University:USA; 2005, p. 91-92, 105-109.

⁸⁰ From Mercer, p.59, Utterance 214

⁸¹ From Assmann; *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt*, p.99.

mortuary rituals of even early times, before the experiences of the Intermediate Periods, these unique manifestations of personality -- the *ba* and the *ka* -- were rather treated as a tricky problem to be overcome through cultic activity. For, the *ba* and *ka* of the commoner, unlike those of the king, were not seen to be automatically subsumed into, nor return to, a divine source. Rather, the commoner's *ba* was seen to dissociate from the other components of personality in death, thereby bringing one's existence into question. From the time of the Old Kingdom and onwards, very specific measures would therefore be taken to insure that the personality of the deceased would, or at least could, be reintegrated into some form.

The most lasting and most obvious sign of concern for the existence of the deceased is embodied in the very architecture of the ancient mastaba tomb. The original mastaba -- a word derived from modern Arabic -- is and was a specifically rectangular tomb consisting of a raised wall, several feet high, bracketing a number of sunken chambers, which housed the deceased, along with a large array of functional and symbolic objects required by the deceased post-mortem⁸². The oldest surviving mastabas were constructed for the early dynastic and proto-dynastic kings, and included in their layouts and construction a generous allocation of chambers for family members, spouses, and favoured retainers. This arrangement therefore allowed the favoured close proximity to the manifestation-vessel (the mummy or corpse) of the risen Osiris, and perhaps allowed them to benefit from the upkeep of the royal cult⁸³. By Dynasty III, private mastabas began to become commonplace, as high-ranking officials of the court seem to have gained such leave from the king, when not benefiting from the king's direct patronage. Royal tomb building, by the time of King Djoser and his renowned (and later deified) vizier,

82 Assmann emphasizes that the ancient mastaba was explicitly constructed as an image of the symbolic Primeval Mound, which first rose out of the primal, chaotic Oneness, and from which first rose the *maat*-bringing Sun. To that end, the mastaba itself would be piled with a mound of sand. The image of the Primeval Mound would be retained in a later age in the form of the megalithic pyramid, and in the comparatively miniature "pyramidia" of the Middle and New Kingdoms. See Assmann; *The Mind of Egypt*, p.52-59.

83 See Assmann; *The Mind of Egypt*, p.54-59.

Imhotep, had distinctly moved towards the familiar pyramid tomb, which retained the symbolic form of the mastaba as a massive wall surrounding the pyramid itself, the courtyard, cult temples, and the many ancillary tombs of the favoured and the fortunate. The private mastaba, meanwhile, became increasingly elaborate, to the extent that the tombs of certain officials, such as Ptahhotep of Dynasty V, possessed not only a well-equipped mastaba, but also a series of adjacent tomb-buildings which, all in all, outstripped the tombs of the early kings in both opulence and durability.

The standardized features of a non-royal tomb consisted, by that era, of three crucial components. First and foremost was the burial chamber itself, which, preferably, would be located deep below the main chamber itself, joined only by a vertical shaft. The preserved, or, later, mummified corpse of the departed would there be stored, usually in a coffin or sarcophagus. The second feature would be the so-called "false door", which separated the burial shaft from the main chamber. The term "door", however, is misleading, for the niche in question was usually, at best, the stylized impression of a door, rather than a portal traversable by a living creature. The false door itself would often be painstakingly decorated with text, according to the means of the builder, but would include an offering table for the placement of food and drink. The third feature would be a statue of the deceased, sometimes placed behind a wall, in a chamber adjoining the main and viewable via slits, but sometimes placed within the false door, or placed within the main chamber itself⁸⁴.

None of these features of the commoner's tomb was purely and exclusively utilitarian in function, and all three would be retained in some shape or form in later eras, long after the mastaba ceased to be the favoured tomb design. Tomb

⁸⁴ See Frankfort; *Ancient Egyptian Religion*, p.92-102, and Assmann; *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt*, p.91-95, 112, on tomb layout.

inscriptions and artwork maintained at the Louvre and elsewhere⁸⁵, and records of the so-called "Opening of the Mouth" mortuary ceremony, provide a glimpse into the meaning of the complex arrangement. Firstly, the supreme effort taken to preserve and protect the corpse of the deceased is itself testimony as to the perceived importance of the body, even in death, to the continuation of the personality and of existence. The details of the mummification process are themselves particularly telling, as, whenever possible, as many internal organs would be removed from the corpse as possible, with one exception -- the heart. Whereas other organs, the brain included, were at best, preserved in canopic jars stored nearby, but separate from, the corpse, the heart (*jb*) alone was kept within the mummy -- for the heart, the perceived center of thought and emotion, was seen to be an indispensable member of both living and dead. One can thus deduce that both the body -- that is to say, its external shell, bones, muscles and sinews -- and the heart needed to be retained, and to be kept, literally, in as close a relationship to one another as possible⁸⁶.

Secondly, one might speculate as to the purpose of retaining an access shaft to a burial chamber, if the end would be to protect the integrity of the corpse against all possibility of tampering or destruction. The records themselves are explicit on the reasoning. While it was vital for the corpse and the heart to be preserved together and protected from harm within the burial chamber, it was equally vital for those aspects of person-hood to be brought into a relationship with both the *ba* and *ka* of the deceased. In Egyptian art and hieroglyphs, the symbol of the *ba* is a depiction of a bird-like entity possessed of a human face and, sometimes, human arms⁸⁷. In tomb art, including sarcophagus carvings, the *ba* is shown descending the burial shaft at night for the sake of reuniting with the corpse, and rejuvenate both itself as *ba*, and the transfigured personality as whole, about which we will have more to say shortly.

⁸⁵ See Frankfort, *Ancient Egyptian Religion*, plates 17-24.

⁸⁶ See Assmann, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt*, p.103.

⁸⁷ See Frankfort; *Ancient Egyptian Religion*, plate 17, 20.

The principal points revealed by these arrangements are twain. On the one hand, existence was not seen as possible, even in death, if the components of a personality were indefinitely, spatially separated from one another; existence required at least periodic spatial re-integration, if not unity. On the other hand, in spite of tendencies to translate "*ba*" as "soul" or "spirit", there is no indication that Egyptians themselves perceived the *ba* to be a purely spiritual substance or essence. The necessity of incorporating an entryway to the burial chamber into general tomb design stems from the very materiality of the *ba* -- albeit, perhaps, its rarefied materiality. This recalls to mind Augustine's famous distinction between those conceiving of the soul as fully spiritual and as transcending the being of the world (the cosmos), and those conceiving the soul as a material immanent to the world⁸⁸.

Thirdly, the false door and offering table are revealed to provide a cultic function in the maintenance and re-integration of the deceased's *ka*. The *ka*, as the vital essence of one's person, was seen to remain essentially unchanged in death, except insofar as death resulted, once again, in its dissociation from the other personal members -- *ba*, body, heart, name, and shadow. This dissociation of the *ka*, in fact, was captured in the colloquial expression "to go to one's *ka*", which stood both as a euphemism for death, but also as an expression of the belief that expiring resulted in the physical separation of the dead from their *ka*, and for the hope of reunification with it. More to the point, the means of maintaining the *ka* of a deceased commoner did not essentially differ from the needs of a live commoner; maintaining one's vital force required food and drink. As a result, one of the most common mortuary rituals of the Two Lands consisted in providing meals for the departed before the false door, inside their tomb. The "doors" themselves, far from being meant as a portal for the living, were meant as symbolic portals for the *ka*'s of

88 See Augustine, *Confessions*, VII.x, XIV.ii.

the dead, which were thought to emerge in order to sup on the vital *ka*-stuff of the provided sustenance, and to thereby sustain themselves⁸⁹.

Finally, the cult statues of the dead, by all indications, and much like the cult statues of the gods, were seen, not so much as representations of the deceased, but as vessels for their appearance or manifestation on earth. By means of the cult statue, the well-equipped dead, much like the cosmic gods, could enjoy the sensual pleasures derived from ritual activities -- the scent of incense burning in censers, the sights of well-rehearsed formalities, the sounds of pious hymns and music, and so forth. In effect, the cult statue served as an alternate body for the deceased, and etymological evidence suggests that early Egyptians themselves did not consider there to be any fundamental difference between a ritually sanctified corpse and a similarly prepared statue⁹⁰. Of all of the seemingly fundamental components of personhood, only the mysterious shadow (*shut*) seems to have lacked a specific physical expression in the architecture of a well-formed tomb⁹¹. The *rn* ("name") of the deceased, by contrast, was secured quite simply through its inscription on the walls of the tomb, and on commemorative stelai⁹².

The common tomb, then, was no simple receptacle for the storage of corpses, nor a site for merely honouring the departed, nor even a focal-point for the veneration of one's ancestors. First and above all, the tomb of commoners (a super-set which, we must recall, included all Egyptians save the king) was the house of

89 See Frankfort; *Ancient Egyptian Religion*, p.90-91.

90 See Assmann; *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt*, p.105-106, on the pictographic similarity of the hieroglyphs of corpse and statue; *ibid*, p.91 on the role of ritual in separating the *ba* and corpse after death, and *ibid*, p.109 on the meaning of multiple cult statues.

91 A brief allusion to the fear of the loss of one's shadow is made in: pKairo CG 25095 (pMaiherperi).

92 The significance of the *rn* to the ancient Egyptian quest for immortality is made clear by the care which was taken to remove all traces of the name of certain kings. Following the so-called Amarna Revolution, the names of Akhenaton (c. 1350-1334) and Tutankhamen (c. 1334-1325) were systematically and zealously removed from every surface and record in Egypt. Conversely, in the Middle Kingdom text, *In Praise of Learned Scholars*, found in *ANET*, p.431, it is posited by the royal bureaucrats that through one's works, one can achieve an immortality in one's *rn*, an immortality which was openly said to be difficult or impossible to achieve through the mortuary cult.

ritual activity, which was itself intended to preserve the immortality, the post-mortem existence, of the tomb's occupants. The greatest hope of the average Egyptian, however, was not to simply persist after death as a loose association of two or three aspects of their person. The high hope was to persist in death as an *akh* (plural, *akhu*) or transfigured spirit. For, as an *akh*, one could boast of the complete re-association of that which was rendered asunder by expiring. Such a transfigured state, however, did not resemble the personal unity of life, nor could it -- the living mummy which walks the earth is more a fiction of modern fancy than an accurate reflection of ancient hopes or expectations. The *akh* was not presumed to walk the Land, but rather to make its home among the eternal, circumpolar stars, or else to follow in the retinue of the Sun-god⁹³. In either event, such transfiguration symbolized the specifically Egyptian experience of transcendence as an attunement or unification with the sensible cosmos. Crucially though, this transfigured state was not sensed to auto-perpetuate. To continue to enjoy the privileges of immortality, and a place in the heavens, one was required to both act on one's own behalf, pre- and post- mortem, and to arrange for others to undertake cultic activities for one's benefit.

Thus, the transfiguration of existence required several coordinated activities. Firstly, one would make arrangements for the construction of an adequate tomb, years before one's expected death. This would require hiring teams of skilled artisans capable of constructing the tomb, of decorating it, and of supplying cult statues and, possibly, a sarcophagus. Somewhere before, during, or after that process, one would need to arrange to have a family both capable and willing to take one's afterlife into their hands. Failing that, one would make arrangements with the local temple for priests to periodically attend to one's mortuary rituals. Next, one must expire in a fashion which preserves both the body and the heart. Then, one

⁹³ See Frankfort; *Ancient Egyptian Religion*, p.100-102.

must be entombed, and have performed those rituals which preserve and sanctify the corpse and heart, and free the *ba*. At night, one's freed *ba* must then be willing and able to descend into the tomb, and to incubate in the coffin-womb in order to rejuvenate itself, the corpse, and the heart, and to reinvigorate the association of those components of personhood with one another. During the day, one's *ka* must then have the conviction to emerge through the false door and to renew itself from the offerings which one's relatives have hopefully provided. Last, but not least, one's tomb, body (or bodies, if one is supplied with a statue, or statues), and heart must be preserved for all time. Should all of these factors be addressed, one may then succeed in subsisting as a blessed *akh* forever.

Unfortunately for the common Egyptian of the Old Kingdom, forever did not turn out to be very long.

§2. Death and the Immanent Disorder

The disintegration of the cosmological empire during and after the reign of Pepi II (Dynasty V, c.2279-2181) was not simply a pragmatic disorder effecting the organization of a state. Rather, the immanent disorder of the Two Lands was fundamentally experienced as a spiritual crisis which threatened the order of existence itself.

As we have already seen in the *Admonitions of Ipu-Wer*, the disintegration of centralized rule and of the effectiveness of the king's role as the mediator of *maat*, was a cause for consternation, disorientation, and outright despair among the populace. Most shocking to the spiritual sensitivities of one such as Ipu-Wer, it could even be reported that:

Why really, many dead are buried in the river. The stream is a tomb, and the embalming-place has really become the stream... Why really, crocodiles [sink] down because of what they have carried off, (for) men go to them of their own accord. ...

The horror which these suicides represented within the semantic context of traditional Egypt can scarcely be overstated. For a man or a woman of the Land to do away with themselves by wading into the divine Nile for the sake of being dragged to the bottom and consumed by crocodiles was not simply gruesome. One can appreciate that such an act, by destroying the integrity of the *khat* ("body") and *jb* ("heart") before *ka*, *ba*, or *shut* might be freed from them, amounted to an attempt to destroy one's existence altogether. Suicide by crocodile would represent the most extreme form of self negation possible -- a rejection not only of life, but even of death as an ordering force. In the absence of the king's perceived mediation of the Beyond, the reaction of all too many was not to search for an unseen measure of existence either within or without the cosmos. Rather, the extreme reaction was to bring an end to meaningless existence once and for all, through radically mortalizing acts which suggest themselves from the immortalizing rituals of the mortuary cult. For surely, if immortality might be secured through the preservation of the symbolic members of the person, then a radically mortal death might be secured by destroying those members.

Clearly, not all of the disorientated inhabitants of the Black Land reacted to the immanent disorder by attempting to leap out of existence and into oblivion. The very continuation of events in Egypt for a further two and a half millennia is indication enough of that. During the First Intermediate Period, however, one perceives the first emergence of a new phenomenon: the contemplation of death as the measure or the means towards *maat*. As was briefly revealed in the *Protests of the Eloquent Peasant*, the peasant, Hunanup, could effortlessly conceive of employing suicide as a means of seeking *maat* against the *isfet* of Dehuti-Necht and Meruitensi.

In another remarkable document, *A Dispute Over Suicide*, the contemplation of death and suicide as legitimate acts of *maat* becomes thematic. The scene of the dispute consists of a man (Man), and his *ba* (Ba)⁹⁴. Man is weary of life, and feels betrayed by his *ba*, which he feels has dissociated itself from him in life. He thus makes an appeal to it:

*See, my soul misleads me, but I do not listen to it; draws me toward death ere (I) have come to it and casts (me) on the fire to burn me [...] it approaches me on the day of trouble and it stands on yonder side as does a ... Such is he who goes forth that he may bring himself for him. O my soul, too stupid to ease misery in life and yet holding me back from death ere I come to it, sweeten the West for me. Is it (too much) trouble? Yet life is a transitory state, and even trees fall. Trample on wrong, for my misery endures...*⁹⁵

[In response to my Ba's reply] I said: "I have not gone, (even though) that is on the ground. Indeed, you leap away, but you will not be cared for. Every prisoner says: 'I will take you,' but you are dead, though your name lives. Yonder is a resting place attractive to the heart; the West is a dwelling place, rowing [...] face. If my guiltless soul listens to me and its heart is in accord with me, it will be fortunate, for I will cause it to attain the West, like one who is in his pyramid, to whose burial a survivor attended. I will [...] over] your corpse, so that you make another soul envious in weariness. I will ..., then you will not be cold, so that you make envious another soul which is hot. I will drink water at the eddy, I will raise up shade so that you make envious another soul which is hungry. If you hold me back from death in this manner, you will find nowhere you can rest in the West. Be so kind, my soul, my brother, as to become my heir who shall make offering and stand at the tomb on the day of burial, that he may prepare a bier for the necropolis."

His Ba, however, is less than enthused about Man's plan, and issues a counter-appeal for him to forget death, and live for the day:

My soul opened its mouth to me that it might answer what I had said: "If you think of burial, it is a sad matter; it is a bringer of weeping through making a man miserable; it is taking a man from his house, he being cast on the high ground, never again will you go up that you may see the sun. Those who built in granite and constructed halls

⁹⁴ For comparison to the following analysis, cf. Voegelin, Eric; "Immortality: Experience and Symbol" in *The Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 60, No. 3 (Jul., 1967), pp. 235-279, to whom it is indebted.

⁹⁵ From Simpson, p.201-209.

in goodly pyramids with fine work, when the builders became gods their stelae were destroyed, like the weary ones who died on the riverbank through lack of a survivor, the flood having taken its toll and the sun likewise to whom talk the fishes of the banks of the water. Listen to me; behold it is good for men to hear. Follow the happy day and forget care.

A peasant ploughed his plot and loaded his harvest aboard a ship, towing it when his time of festival drew near. He saw the coming of the darkness of the northerly, for he was vigilant in the boat when the sun set. He escaped with his wife and children, but came to grief on a lake infested by night with crocodiles. At last he sat down and broke silence, saying: 'I weep not for yonder mother, who has no more going forth from the West for another (term) upon earth; I sorrow rather for her children broken in the egg, who have looked in the face of the crocodile god ere they have lived.'

Disgusted by his *ba*'s advice to forsake morality in favour of a life of empty hedonism, the man responds with a lengthy condemnation, an equally lengthy recounting of the deficiencies of life, and a reinvigorated assertion of his intentions, along with his reasoning:

*"Behold, my name is detested,
Behold, more than the smell of vultures
On a summer's day when the sky is hot...⁹⁶*

*To whom can I speak today?
Men are contented with evil
And goodness is neglected everywhere.*

*To whom can I speak today?
He who should enrage a man by his ill deeds,
he makes everyone laugh (by) his wicked wrongdoing...*

*Death is in my sight today
[As when] a sick man becomes well,
Like going out-of-doors after detention...*

⁹⁶ Alternate translation, by Wilson, in *ANET*, p.406:

*"Behold, my name will reek through thee
More than the stench of bird-droppings
On summer days, when the sky is hot."*

*Verily, he who is yonder will be a living god,
Averting the ill of him who does it.*

*Verily, he who is yonder will be one who stands in the Bark of the Sun,
Causing choice things to be given therefrom for the temples.*

*Verily, he who is yonder will be a sage
Who will not be prevented from appealing to Re when he speaks."*

The text then closes with Ba's final appeal:

*What my soul said to me: "Cast complaint upon the peg, my comrade and brother;
make offering on the brazier and cleave to life, according as I have said. Desire me
here, thrust the West aside, but desire that you may attain the West when your body
goes to earth, that I may alight after you are weary; then will we make an abode
together..."*

Several unusual features present themselves in the tale of the *Dispute*. To begin, there is the initial oddity of the thematic set-up; the speaking characters of the text are not two men, but a man and his disputatious *ba*. The *ba*, however, is strangely dissociated from the man himself; it "stands on yonder side", and seeks to thwart his intentions. For his part, Man is ultimately unconcerned with the normal preparations for death, which are traditionally held to insure his immortality as an *akh*. Rather than beseeching his *ba* to remain with him, Man rather promises to intercede on behalf of Ba from beyond the veil; he will provide for its comfort on earth through the usual customs, if it will refrain from attempting to dissuade him from his course. It is Ba which pleads with Man to remain "here". Man does not promise that his alienated *ba* will join with him in the West. Rather, like a king in his pyramid, Man will cause Ba to be transfigured in *its* death; that Ba's corpse and heart will be looked after, and that it will become the object of envy. Ba, the figurative stand-in for the traditional, Egyptian symbolic order of the soul, will be left behind,

albeit in relative comfort, while Man departs for “yonder”. If, however, Ba persists in obstructing the plan, it “will find no rest in the West”. Man counsels that Ba should instead concede to his preparations, and become his “heir” in death. In essence, Ba, the experientially empty symbol of the traditional order of Egypt, will be left behind to live a comfortable, if pointless, time on earth, attending to the comforting, if pointless, mortuary cult of Man. Man, however, recognizes the cult to be a useless show.

Man’s “heir”, however, will have none of it. It itself brazenly retorts that the ritual preparations will be for naught in any case. Have not even the granite tombs of the pyramids been despoiled, and names inscribed on the stelai been wiped out? What then has become of those gods? For all of their preparations, the occupants, even if anything of them still occupies their tombs, are no better off than if they had died on the riverbank, and become food for the fish. Ba, far from reinforcing the traditional beliefs which it itself symbolizes, instead undermines the experience of immortality and the divine which the mortuary cults once institutionalized and expressed. Man’s Ba is thus made to express the characteristic fear of the age -- that there is no hope in death. It is terror, not love of life *per se*, which alienates Ba from Man. The traditional symbols and institutions, which sought to express existence as participation in the timeless Beyond through attunement to the cosmion and the cosmos, have become an impediment to the experience which had engendered them. Nevertheless, Ba follows up its speech with a traditional argument, that life is both a blessing and a gift of the gods, and that the only tragedy is to have never been born at all:

A peasant ploughed his plot and loaded his harvest aboard a ship, towing it when his time of festival drew near. He saw the coming of the darkness of the northerly, for he was vigilant in the boat when the sun set. He escaped with his wife and children, but came to grief on a lake infested by night with crocodiles. At last he sat down and broke

silence, saying: 'I weep not for yonder mother, who has no more going forth from the West for another (term) upon earth; I sorrow rather for her children broken in the egg, who have looked in the face of the crocodile god ere they have lived.'

Man, however, is disgusted with Ba's cravenness, and its lack of dignity. If he listens to its advice, his name will reek in the memories of men more than the droppings of vultures on a hot summer's day. That indeed would be an immortality of a sort, but one unfitting of a man. The existential turmoil of the Land, moreover, is so pronounced that life in it has become an endless insult against truth (*maat*). Better to pass into the West, where one can both be freed from the pressure to connive in the corruption of men, and where one can become an effective force in the restoration of *maat*.

Embedded within the overarching narrative are three perspectives of note. First is Man's expressed sensation that pragmatic and paradigmatic existence, which once were tightly interwoven under the order of the Old Kingdom, had decoupled. The pragmatic exigencies of life in the moral disorder of the First Intermediate Period had become an insult against the paradigmatic demands both of and for a well-ordered, unchanging cosmos. Conversely, attempts at a state of attunement to the traditional experience of the cosmos of living gods did not only flout the practical demands of life in an era of corruption and disorder (already evidenced by *The Protests of the Eloquent Peasant* and *Instructions of Merikare*). Such attempts would also fly in the face of the evident indications that traditional institutions and practices were, in and of themselves, inadequate to the task of providing immortality, or of infusing order into existence. Indeed, the fundamental symbols of existence, of the life of the soul, had become moribund. For the figure of Man, the disjunction between the two pulls of existence, pragmatic and paradigmatic, resolved itself as an opposition between death and life, *maat* and *isfet*, Truth and the

Lie. Existence in accordance with Truth had become possible only in death; for a decent human being to put it off for another day meant to partake in the Lie of life.

In addition to this severe polarization of the world into discrete realms of the divine and the profane, separated by the abyss of death, one finds the aforementioned skepticism voiced by Ba, itself the representative of tradition, regarding the efficacy of traditional beliefs and the mortuary cult. As Ba relates, even the best protected tombs have been despoiled, thereby bringing the cult to naught. As related in both the *Dispute Over Suicide* and the *Admonitions of Ipu-Wer*, one simply could not, in that contemporary disorder, count on one's family, friends, or priests to be either willing or able to maintain one's status in the afterlife⁹⁷. Given the traditional reliance upon mortuary rituals and the tomb for the maintenance of one's transfigured personality in death, the collapse of the cult and the robbing of tombs came with the implication of the irreversible dissociation and dissolution of the dead, both past and future. In effect, the disorder of the political realm was equally experienced to be a disorder of the cosmos and of personal immortality. In the primary experience of the cosmological myth, the entire quaternarian, consubstantial structure of reality was liable to be thought to be falling into disarray as a result of any one or more realms (men, society, the cosmos, or the gods) fell into disorder.

While one response to the fall from *maat* into *isfet* was the life of hedonism, and another the flight into oblivion, a third path is suggested by Man. Rather than remain in life as an ineffective conniver, or flee into the abyss, Man intends apotheosis -- to stand in the bark of the Sun, like a god, where he will appeal to and intercede with the creator for the sake of restoring cosmic reality to its proper axis. The old symbols of timeless immortality have fallen into disrepute, but that has not

⁹⁷ The deceased might, at times, attempt to get by with the appearance of food in the form of paintings, or with simply being wished food by a caring passer-by. See Frankfort; *Ancient Egyptian Religion*, p.95.

put an end to Man's intimation of a state transcending temporal mortality. Life in the Metaxy, in-between "here" and "there", time and timelessness, does not necessarily end for Man or men when the immanent order of institutions and symbols has fall into disarray. With alternate paths rejected, the one chosen by Man is that of spiritual renewal and the evocation of new symbols expressing existence in *maat* -- of a leap in being which propels Man beyond the horizon of tradition.

§3. Death and Magic

The brief flaring of spiritual transcendence which was represented in the anonymous author of the *Dispute* did not result in a shattering of the cosmological myth in favour of something akin to the anthropological myth of Hellas or the soteriological experiences issuing from Israel. Man's pneumatic ascent from a world gone profane, and his efforts to renew the Two Lands through his personal refraction of the Ground in the experience of death, did not flower into a world-shaping movement. The myth of the death in life, and life in death of Man resulted in neither a Church, nor an Academy.

That is not to say that the myth of the cosmos remained unshaken in the wake of the experiences of the First Intermediate Period. When the pharaonic order was eventually re-established under Mentuhotep II (c. 2040-2010), life did not truly revert to those forms which had held for the centuries of the first six dynasties of god-kings. In particular, the experience of the failures of the traditional mortuary cult was indelibly imprinted into the cultural memory of Egypt from the Middle Kingdom and onwards.

The specific problems which are presented by this muted mutation of the established cosmological myth deserve clarification. To begin, one may legitimately

ask why the quintessentially Egyptian form, with its complex interpenetration of life and death, king, cosmos, and gods, was not simply supplanted by a new myth when the old order collapsed. In a certain sense, however, that form was effectively supplanted, though in such a fashion that the veneer of the myth of the Old Kingdom was retained, over a new, underlying experiential reality. The primary experience of the cosmos of those early inhabitants of the Old Kingdom had, as we have seen, evoked the myth of the Two Lands as the divine habitat of humanity under the gods. Such existence was seen to remain essentially timeless and a-historical as long as men remained attuned to the supreme, consubstantial reality of the cosmos. This primary experience of reality found its specific linguistic expression in a genus of compact and interwoven symbols of gods (Horus, Osiris, the Enneads, the various summodeistic demiurges) and cosmos, society (the Two Lands, the temple-cities of the gods, the bureaucratic representatives of Horus), and men (*ba*, *ka*, *jb*, *rn*, *shut*, and *X.t*). Such is the richness of this variety of symbols that it has taken decades of study and meditation for scholars to begin to unravel their meaning.

The perhaps perverse trouble which arises from any such complex web of symbolism, however, is the aptness of those who have not partaken in the engendering experiences to misinterpret, to literalize, to dogmatize, or to treat the symbols as if they were things or objects of intentionalistic consciousness⁹⁸. At best, the language of the myth itself becomes the medium by which the primary experience may be evoked. In either case, one may, as Voegelin suggests, speak of “secondary experiences” and “secondary symbols” which develop as an intervening or intermediating layer between consciousness and reality⁹⁹. In effect, in the experience-reality-language complex of the primary experience, language and its symbols may shift “left”, and interpose itself between experience and reality, thus

⁹⁸ See, for instance, Voegelin; *Structures in Consciousness*, I.1-4, and O&H, v.5, p.46, 48, 98, 117-120.

⁹⁹ See Voegelin; O&H, v.4; p. 202-203, and “The Eclipse of Reality” in Voegelin; *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, v.28: *What is History? And Other Late Unpublished Writings*.

evoking the secondary experience of experience-language-reality. The great danger, of course, is that, in times of personal or political distress, that the semantic web of the secondary experience may prove too opaque for consciousness of engendering reality.

This seems to be the principal problem confronting analysis of the Egyptian form of the myth “before” and “after” periods of crisis. While it is often readily apparent to scholars that significant changes had occurred, those changes are difficult to pin-point, for the reason that the new existential and political conditions were expressed in terms of the familiar panoply of tokens, images, and emblems of an earlier, qualitatively different epoch. It is only when significantly new symbols, such as the myth of the king as “Son of God”, make their appearance, that one can easily point to the development of something new. However, as we have also seen, even the symbolism of the king as “Son of God” had to coexist alongside the ancient symbol of the king as Horus incarnate. Only the diminution of the king’s official epithet from “The Great God” to “The Good God” stands as an obvious indication as to the extent to which the experience of the king as creator had worn away by the Middle Kingdom.

With regards to the experience of death, and the related consciousness of mortality and immortality stemming from the primary experience of temporality and timelessness, it seems clear from the *Dispute* and the *Admonitions* that the originally engendered symbols and their institutionalization had, in fact, become impediments to transcendence and to existence. The complicated array of symbolic expressions of the human person -- of body/corpse/mummy/statue, heart, vital essence, manifestation, shadow and name -- had been reconciled within the overarching myth of the cosmos. This, however, was done through an equally complicated web of relationships and cultic activities which institutionalized the

originating experiences of mortality and immortality, time and timelessness, within the cosmos. The experience of death, in short, was mediated through ritual, and ritual thus gave balance to an existence which seemed caught in-between the pulls towards both oblivious nothingness and transcendent lastingness. The failure of the sophisticated apparatuses of the cult under less than ideal conditions left the general population of the Two Lands with an enormous mortgage of secondary symbols which, under the circumstances, were incapable of evoking the primary experiences which were needed to stabilize existence. Quite to the contrary, immortality of any sort, without a stable mortuary mechanism, seemed so self-evidently impossible, that many chose to feed themselves to Nile predators rather than suffer mortality in a meaningless cosmos.

That weighty mortgage of accumulated, secondary symbols did not, though, simply disappear during the crisis of the First Intermediate Period. Nor did they disappear during the Second, or the Third, or during the period of foreign rule under the Assyrians, the Persians, or the Macedonians. Rather, they came to be complemented by a host of new primary and secondary symbols (occasionally, even tertiary symbols), which adapted the cults to a new form. The first new source of meaning stemmed from the pharaonic cult of Osiris. The second stemmed from the traditional Egyptian fascination with magic, in the sense of sorcery, or wizardry. The third stemmed from anxieties of existence brought on by the immanent disorders themselves.

When the collapse of the king's rule and divine mediation of *maat* brought with it the collapse of the commoners' mortuary cult, it opened up a new avenue of rituals and "magic spells" by which personal oblivion might be avoided. The new avenue was encapsulated in the royal Pyramid Texts, with which we've become familiar, and which suddenly became available to the general populace as the royal

tombs and temples fell pray to plunder and robbery. With a short period of time, the so-called Coffin Texts begin to appear, inscribed along the inside of common coffins. The vast majority of these inscriptions seem to have been line for line copies of the ritual invocations once used to dramatize the dead kings' ascent to the throne of the underworld and to the bark of the sun-god. Rather than being employed in ritual dramas, the Coffin Texts, unlike the Pyramid Texts, seem to have primarily served as spells by which the deceased might overcome obstacles obstructing their immortalization in the underworld¹⁰⁰. Through this appropriation, traditional pharaonic formulae of the sort "Osiris-N. ascends to the throne" came to refer not to particular kings -- whose particular names were inscribed in the place of "N" -- but to any commoner with access to the "spells". As one result, the final destination of the common dead came to shift from the spatially and visibly well-defined "West" to the invisible underworld.

By the New Kingdom, this original body of "spells" came to be complemented by a wide compendium of newer incantations. This body of magic texts came to address an increasingly broad and bizarre array of dangers and obstacles which were thought to obstruct the path from mortal life to immortal death -- a list of dangers which only seemed to grow as ages wore on. By Dynasty XIX, the imagined dangers included horrifying *shut*-eating monsters (pKairo CG 25095), evil spirits who conspired to force the deceased to eat feces (Spell 189), and even the sun-devouring demon Apophis (Spell 40). In order to prepare for these much a-feared threats, those with the resources would commission the writing of a copy of *The Book of Coming Forth by Day* (aka. *The Book of the Dead*), or else purchase a ready-made copy, and arrange to have it stored with them after expiring.

100 See Faulkner, Raymond O; *The Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead* (ed. Carol Andrews); University of Texas Press, Austin:Texas, 1972, p.11-12

The salient points to be taken from this late development are three. First, that, even at a relatively late date, the common Egyptian's understanding of existence in death was still primarily materialistic, rather than truly spiritual. It was clearly conceived that the dead would carry their personalized copies of *The Book of the Dead* with them on their journey through the underworld, and face real, physical threats on that journey. There is no great hint of a spiritual existence which transcends the material order. Secondly, though, it is apparent that the combined web of symbols was still commonly conceived as a field of "things" or objects to be handled in whatever seemed to be an appropriate fashion. In the Old Kingdom, the symbols of the personality were seen as objects to be handled through ritual activity. In the Middle Kingdom, and more markedly in the New Kingdom and later, the "things" of the soul and of the primary experience of temporality and timelessness were largely treated as objects to be manipulated through magic. A fundamental shift towards an anthropological or soteriological understanding of existence, of the sort suggest by the *Dispute*, never emerged as an effective social force. Thirdly, the semantic web of the Old Kingdom assumed the continuous ritual activity on behalf of deceased to be both necessary and plausible. By the end of the First Intermediate Period, having identified one's own death with a literalized myth of Osiris as a means to escape the futility of the old cult, the new mortuary cult assumed it possible to assure immortality through a single round of activity: prepare, pass through the field of otherworldly obstacles with the help of one's magic, and stand trial at one's/Osiris' final judgment. Assuming both that one's heart was not heavier than the feather of Maat (the once figurative personification of *maat*)¹⁰¹, and that one did not lack the magic necessary to rig the trial, a happy and unending afterlife could be assured.

101 For the myth of the Judgment of the Dead, see *ibid*, p.27-34 (Spell 30B and 125).

While the cosmological myth was not broken by the disorder or the anxieties of the Intermediate Periods, its form was certainly altered by their memory. Reliance upon others for one's afterlife became rather unpopular, while reliance upon magic increased. Among the "others" whose help could not be counted on was the king, whose status as the horizon of existence in both life and death had noticeably diminished. By the Middle Kingdom, the deceased themselves appropriated the role of Osiris-N. or Osiris-So-and-So, in order to themselves appear before the court of the dead, and plead their case for immortality before the personified gods. However, there remains a "misplaced concreteness", to borrow from Whitehead, about the common understanding of the Judgment. Supposedly cagey individuals, after all, often commissioned spells which would prevent their hearts or their *ba's* from tattling on their moral misdeeds in life, which would result in their hearts being fed to the monster Ammit, thus bringing about a second, more permanent, death. On the one hand, immorality and mortality, and, conversely, morality and immortality, became tied within the myth in a manner anticipated by the *Dispute*. On the other hand, the new conscience and the gods themselves became caught-up in the web of "things" to be managed through effective wizardry. Under the new myth, existence within the cosmos was still sensed to be endangered by the transition from life to death. The new development was the explicit sense that personal conduct, rather than a lack of ritual preparedness *per se*, threatened one's timeless attunement to the cosmic order. The driving and explicit fear remained the fall from truth into meaninglessness.

Chapter 4 - Time

§1. History and Egypt

"Now then, if thou dost these things, thou art skilled in the writings. As for those learned scribes from the time of those who lived after the gods, they who could foretell what was to come, their names have become everlasting, (even though) they are gone, they completed their lives, and all their relatives are forgotten." – In Praise of Learned Scribes¹⁰²

In Henri Frankfort's seminal, and highly influential analyses of ancient Egyptian culture and institutions, he predominately stressed what he perceived as the static nature of the Egyptian myth. This, as he saw it, found expression in the Egyptian impulse to deprecate the importance – or at least the meaningfulness, of novel or unexpected events. Both the myth and its institutionalized practice as ritual, he argued, pointed towards a conception of the real which privileged the static and the natural, which, to the Egyptian mind, consisted of two sides of the very same coin. By this conception, nature was the static repetition of a circular cycle, and only the static could make a claim to being natural. The seasons, the gods, the celestial bodies, the inundations of the Nile, the plants, and the animals were all seen to effortlessly gravitate towards their natural place within the divine cosmic order of *maat*. Only humans seemed to need to put concerted effort into harmonizing themselves with that *maat*, and only humans seemed capable of failing to do so.

The purpose of human life, then, was to attune to the divine nature through the practice of the myths embodied in the Land's institutions and rituals. The purpose of the king – who was not, strictly speaking, a human, if we recall – was to aid in this process of the integration of humanity into the cosmos. Political disasters, as a result, were meaningless in the pregnant sense of the term – they both contributed no meaning to life or existence, and were, in fact, an impediment to the meaningful. To Frankfort, the persistence of the Egyptian drive towards integration

¹⁰² From *ANET*, p. 431.

with an apparently static cosmos -- which was epitomized in the movements of the celestial bodies -- was the essential characteristic of the overarching Egyptian "form". When that form broke under the pressures of the Graeco-Roman occupations, it represented the "death" of Egypt as a civilization or political organism.

Underlying Frankfort's analysis, therefore, one might perceive two positions. One is the adoption of the Hippocratic-Platonic-Aristotelian designation of "form" as the purposeful integration of the members which constitute a whole. When that integrated whole -- we may speak of it, figuratively, as an "organism" -- is disintegrated, we may speak of it as "dead" or "gone". Second, though related to the first, is Frankfort's identification of the meaningful activity of the Egyptian form as the integration of its human members into the circular rhythms of nature. In effect, the scholar identifies "true" or "meaningful" time, for the Egyptian, to be circular time, with all breeches in that circle experienced as chaotic aberrations to be avoided or overcome.

It is characteristic of Frankfort's stupendous work on Egypt that his focus served the aim of drawing out the depth and extent to which this experience of meaningful time as circular found expression. While the Egyptologist did not claim that the Egyptian experience was purely and undeviatingly circular, his focus did not often shift to analyzing other experiences of time. We may readily perceive why: having identified the purpose of the Egyptian form as integration into circular time, deviations from that form of purpose could only be interpreted as a form of sickness. Frankfort, however, was principally interested in the life of Egypt. Sickness had significance to his studies only insofar as it represented a counterpoint to a state of health.

Eric Voegelin, by contrast, initially agreed with Frankfort's assessment of the experience of time which had engendered, and which was mediated in turn, by the Egyptian cosmological myth and its institutional expressions. By the time he wrote volume IV of his five-volume series *Order and History*, however, his assessment had changed. As related here in §3 of the introduction, Voegelin, by that time, had come to question key assumptions of the classical tradition. He came to see the traditional association of pagan cultures and mythological or mythopoeic thought with circular time to be a misinterpretation, if not misrepresentation, of the empirical materials. To summarize what was related previously, Voegelin's reassessment of Egypt followed from two factors. First was his identification of "history", as such, not with "spirit", "progress", or "Providence", but rather with something like the working out and the *travaux* of particular forms of order within time.

In this, Voegelin was in agreement with Frankfort vis-a-vis history as form, its alteration, and disintegration. He differed from Frankfort, however, in that he more explicitly defined all forms of human order as grounded in an experience and longing of and for the timeless and eternal. Second, though, was his identification of an experience of linear time underlying the Egyptian cosmological myth. This was accompanied by his re-labeling of the rituals of the empire, which previously had been considered expressions of an attempt at human integration into a presumably circular order of time. Rather, he observed, the Egyptians – at the very least those post-dating the Old Kingdom – perceived the function of practicing or re-enacting the myth to be to create circular time for the purpose of permitting human integration into a stable, perfectly regular, perfectly circular, order of existence. In times of crisis, such as those represented by the Intermediate Periods, time itself, it was felt, was in danger of slipping off of its axis and progressing into chaos and demonic nothingness.

This experience of a linear march away from eternity and divine order, Voegelin felt, was encapsulated particularly well and clearly in Manetho's historiogenetic myth, the *Aegyptica*. That famous king-list, written in the early Ptolemaic period, speculated on an age of truly divine rule in which the gods themselves (recent pharaoh's excluded, if we recall, as chosen creatures of the god) ruled in Egypt, previous to their withdrawal of their immediate presence from the earth. The lengthy list of kings and dynasties, ending, as it does, in the present of Manetho, was warranted by Voegelin to be evidence of a long-standing awareness of a linear dimension to time. For, Manetho's own king-list drew upon earlier compilations. The purpose of the enactment of the cosmological myth ought not, then, be understood as simply a mimetic exercise aimed at integrating humans into a fundamentally and essentially circular time-cycle of nature. Rather, such enactments were comprehended as efforts at creating and maintaining circular time, irregardless of its naturality.

Jan Assmann's assessment of the Egyptian understanding of time bears a resemblance to those of both Frankfort and Voegelin. On the one hand, he agrees with his fellow Egyptologist that the existential purpose underlying the myths and rituals of that civilization was to integrate humans into an eternal, and circular order. On the other hand, he finds agreement with Voegelin on the subject of the artificiality of that order. That is to say that, in Assmann's view, the much vaunted circular time of the pagan Egyptians was understood to be, by the Egyptians themselves, not "natural", but rather the product or byproduct of their own meaningful ritual activity.

The German archaeologist's insights into the Egyptian experience and expression of time deserves lengthier elaboration. To begin, in *The Mind of Egypt*, Assmann identifies four nouns of the Egyptian tongue, which consistently

designated aspects of time, but which gradually took on different meanings in the context of qualitatively different eras and “semiologies”. These four were *neheh*, *djet*, *iyt*, and *hpryt*, which shall be expanded upon presently. An important preamble, however, must be made, for the modern reader who might expect nouns reflecting the familiar tenses “past”, “present”, and “future”, with perhaps a noun reflecting the imperfect verb tense for good measure. Such expectations would be sorely disappointed, and, indeed, confounded. For, as the scholar is at pains to explain in both *The Mind of Egypt* and elsewhere, in *The Search for God in Ancient Egypt*, the Egyptian language had no word for a meaningful time to come, and would seem to blend “past”, “present” and “imperfect” in manners alien to modern experience. In fact, even the verb tenses of early Egyptian, he points out, possessed not the familiar past, present, and future tenses of Indo-European languages, but rather verbal aspects which he dubbed “resultivity” and “virtuality”¹⁰³.

Two of these words, in particular, would play a central role in the semiotics of the Egyptian myth from its beginnings; *neheh* and *djet*. The two, by Assmann's reckoning, though often indiscriminately translated as “eternity”, have meanings which would see them more accurately rendered as “the never ending reoccurrence of the same” and “that which has become... ripened to its final form... [and] is preserved in immutable permanence”¹⁰⁴. *Neheh*, which the scholar occasionally associates with, or compares to cyclical, rather than circular time, “is generated by the movement of the heavenly bodies, and hence determined by the sun”¹⁰⁵. It may be roughly likened to the philosophical category of becoming, though it does not originate from within the differentiated context of philosophy, but rather the compact, cosmological experience. Within the picto- and iconography of Egyptian

103 Perhaps a vaguely comparable situation may be observed in the Ancient Greek language, in which the aorist aspect may be used to indicate a completed event or past action, or may indicate an instantaneous activity transpiring in the present. Here too, the time tense of the verb is, at best, implied by context.

104 Assmann, *The Mind of Egypt*, p.81.

105 Ibid.

expression, it is represented by the symbolic scarab, and thereby with Khepri and the Sun-god himself. *Neheh's* quintessential, concrete manifestation is the “shining forth” (*khay*) of the Sun from its place of emergence on the eastern horizon (*akhet*), is followed by the daily travel across the heavens (the goddess Nut), and descent into the underworld in the evening. There it continues its journey, before bursting-forth again at dawn. The time-dimension of *neheh* is thus bound-up in the phenomenon of the Sun's “travel” across the heavens, as viewed from the perspective of a sedentary viewer in the Nile Valley. It is also, quite obviously, caught-up in the meaningful explication of that phenomenon in the form of myth. We may add to Assmann's account by noting that the experience of time which is expressed in the symbol *neheh* is undifferentiated, in the sense that it is bound-up with the sense-perception of a particular object which is perceived as traversing space.

Djet, by contrast, “is associated with the concept of stability, of remaining, lasting, being permanent. Its symbols are stone and the mummy, its god Osiris”¹⁰⁶. Unlike *neheh*, *djet* is identified not with spatial motion, but rather with spatial rest. Its “place” is Osiris on his everlasting throne, “there”, in the underworld. Also unlike *neheh*, *djet* has no apparent equivalent in normal philosophic language. While *neheh* might be likened, with due reservations and caveats, to becoming, *djet* bears no likeness to being or Being. Nor can it be likened to either “eternal” or “eternity” without some loss of meaning and context. One may say this is so, for the myth of Osiris is not of an eternal being, *per se*. He is, in different variations of the myth, either “drowned” in the river Nile, or murdered by his brother Seth. The salient point is that the god “dies” and is restored, in some sense, only through the intervention of his sister-wife Isis and sister-sister – in-law Nephthys. His restoration does not return him to the throne of the living king of Egypt, however. That role falls to the son, Horus, through whom the elder god “lives”. Osiris Wennefer (“He

106 Ibid.

who lasts in perfection”) is mummified and given to the underworld. He “lasts” as an unchanging corpse. He no longer “becomes”, but only in the sense that he no longer participates in the cycle of renewal symbolized by *neheh*. His mummification preserves him from both disintegration and becoming. In certain versions of the myth, this separation from the cycle is expressed as Isis saving her brother-husband (or most of him) from becoming food for the fish. The preservation of the corpse removes Osiris from the normal biological cycle which is engendered by the movement of the Sun-god. *Djet*, then, expresses not circular time so much as its negation.

To complete his survey of the semantics of the Egyptian experience of time, Assmann, draws attention to two additional symbols, *iyt* and *hpnyt*. These, the scholar respectively translates as “the coming” and “the occurring”. Strictly speaking, however, the author points out that these words were far from having the connotations one might expect from the modern perspective. Most importantly, it seems, both words lacked, in the beginning, any sense of association with a subjective will or spirit; a trait which seems to have held until, perhaps, the New Kingdom. *Iyt*, which is often translated as “the future”, carried not the connotation of a project of a sovereign will, nor even the expected outcome of a regular process, as is connoted by *neheh*. *Iyt*, instead, appears to have referred to the possibility of misfortune, of the possibility of an occurrence which should not happen, or would not be expected to happen, in a well ordered cosmos. *Iyt*, unlike either *neheh* or *djet*, was not necessarily associated with *maat*, but rather with *isfet*. It was, for centuries, something to be combated through the institutions of the myth, rather than supported. *Hpnyt*, in a similar fashion, carried with it the connotation of unexpected and unwanted events, which were unsanctioned by the mythical expectations of a cosmological Egyptian. As Assmann stresses, neither word carried the meaning of “faring” well or badly according to conformance to certain moral exigencies. Neither

carried any moral connotation or judgment at all. *lyt* and *hpryt* were, in the fullest sense, meaningless occurrences which might even threaten meaningful existence¹⁰⁷. Quoting from *The Tale of the Eloquent Peasant*:

"Gird yourself not for the coming day before it has come; one cannot know what misfortune it brings."

§2. Capturing Time

As we have discovered, or at least attempted to analyze in the preceding chapters, Egypt may be said to have had history, and even a knowledge of history. This is possible if we understand the word, following both Voegelin and Assmann, to refer to the experience of order and disorder, and to the symbolization and institutionalization of the former against the latter. "History", by this reckoning, is the story of existence winning and losing order – of order's evocation, transformation, misapprehension, and abandonment in favour of fresh evocations. It is, if we paraphrase Plato's Athenian Stranger, "unknown to us whether our dance is for the play of the gods, or for some serious purpose."¹⁰⁸

The tragedy and comedy of existence in Ancient Egypt, as we have seen was anything but perfectly static. Egyptians themselves were well aware that things had gone terribly awry in the past and could again. Certain exceptional individuals, such as the anonymous author of the *Dispute*, apparently even sensed that the real troubles emanated from the moribund institutions of the age, which were proving

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, p.239-240.

¹⁰⁸ Adapted from Plato; *Laws* [644d-645d].

incapable of transparently revealing the purpose of existence under less than optimal conditions. As we're also perceived, though while the traditional myth of the cosmos, hoary with age, did not break, it was certainly subjected to adaptation and reinterpretation. The demotion of the king from creator to creature, and the appropriation of the accoutrements of the royal mortuary cult by commoners represent two important adaptations of the Egyptian order.

The story of the adaptation of Egyptians to time is a complex matter in and of itself, and one which evolved with the rise and fall of order in the Nile Valley. In the early ages of the empire of the cosmos, it is clear that the key activities of political order were concerned with the maintenance of circular time. The king's status as the living Horus incarnate stands as a particularly obvious expression of this belief. As is illuminated by the Memphite Theology, the re-unification of the Two Lands under the Great God was the act which brought the Land to its final, perfected form. And, as we have seen in chapter 1, every fresh coronation of a king was very much seen as a fresh creation of that form. In a significant sense, we can perceive that this represented an attempt to bring a halt to "history" – to halt the change and decay of a civilization's form. The continuous renewal of Horus' presence at the head of the Land lowered *neheh* from the heavens to the earth, while the accession of each king to the throne of Osiris brought the king and thereby the Land into a relationship with *djet*.

It would be quite odd, however, if the attempts to control the shape of time and history were limited to the coronation rituals. Common sense dictates that there is plenty of opportunity for history to occur between the king's coronation and death. There is the obvious possibility of conquest or destruction at the hands of the forces of chaos which lay over the horizon. This possibility became reality in the Second Intermediate Period, the Third, and the Persian conquest, for instance. The

only protection against it was the king's army. The only "cure", when it finally occurred, was for a saviour-king to appear and order the forces of Egypt against the foreign chaos. This happened, for instance, under Kamose and Ahmose at the end of the Second Intermediate Period. History, in such cases, needed to be overcome by joining the power and force of Seth with the law and authority of Horus. In short, the expulsion of foreign chaos was very much comprehensible as a re-enactment of the cosmogonic myth. It was, strangely enough, a sort of anti-historiogenesis – an attempt to reverse the world's drift away from the Beginning through mythical action.

A similarly obvious threat to order presents itself in the possibility of disintegration from within, which seems to have actually precipitated the First Intermediate Period, and contributed to the Second. We choose the word "disintegration" rather than "rebellion" or "revolution" quite intentionally. For, out-and-out rebellion against Pharaoh was not a common occurrence during the millenia of pharaonic order. When rebellion did occur, in later eras, it was not against the house of the king *per se*, but against the ineffectual pretender who was perceived to occupy it. There was never anything akin to a revolution, for no other, wholly different form of political order ever presented itself which was accepted as preferable. This much is evinced by the lukewarm response to the quasi-feudal structure which was imposed by Libyan conquerors in the Late Period. The cosmological order under the king may have been shifted, stretched, and even deformed over the centuries, but it was not abandoned nor overturned. Pharaoh remained the divine *omphalos*, the navel of the world, until the myth of the cosmos broke under the weight of the ecumenic empires, and was swept away entirely by universal soteriologies of Christ, and later, Islam.

What did transpire, was the disintegration of the empire as the effective power and authority of the king was eroded. At the end of the Old Kingdom, there is evidence that the increasing accumulation of hereditary offices both decreased the king's effective authority, and allowed the development of local nobilities. After the death of Pepi II, it seems to have been some assortment of these local power-holding families which plunged the land into a dangerous interregnum which lasted roughly one-hundred and fifty years. Similar circumstances may have contributed to the empire's weakness in the face of the Hyksos' invasion.

At any particular time, however, Egyptian tradition identified the most immediate threat to order to emanate from the gods and their earthly retinues. The latter, it should be noted, included not only the priests and petitioners, but also the sometimes vast, landed temple-cities of the gods. Thebes, the temple-city of Amon, for instance, became a power in its own right during the Middle Kingdom. It would, in fact, prove to be the center of resistance to foreign rule in later eras, and king-maker in times of interregnum. More than one foreign pretender would be toppled or challenged by the power of Amon of Thebes. The gods were indeed forces to be reckoned with.

During the early dynasties of the Land, several institutions seem to have been developed for the explicit purpose of lulling the cosmos of gods into Horus' perfected, circular time. The first and most ancient of these was the Sed festival. The second was the monolithic art form, as exemplified in the pyramids. Third, related, and final instrument were the rituals exemplified in the Pyramid Texts. Taken together, those institutions were meant to serve the purpose of insuring both the continuation of *neheh* and *djet*, and to insure their coming together in a sacred chronotope (Assmann's term; from the Greek *chronotopos*, literally, time-space). By extension, they also served to limit the presence of *iyt* and *hprypt*.

Frankfort's work to reconstruct the details of the Sed festival is particularly enlightening, and we shall thus summarize his remarkable work. Some years after the accession of a new Horus to the throne (which, itself was the incarnation of Isis, if we recall), it appears to have been necessary for the king to engage in certain revitalizing rituals. This collection of cultic activities, together ordered into the Sed festival, seems to have had as its principle purpose, the revitalization of the king's vital essence or *ka*. The king's *ka*, if we remember, was wholly unlike that of a common Egyptian. It was the vital essence of the Land's *maat* itself, and stemmed directly from the divine fountainhead, the Sun-god, while the *ka*'s of common folk stemmed from that of the king. Maintaining the king's *ka* was therefore seen to be of great importance. As such, the Sed might be held on the 30th anniversary of the king's accession, but might also be held earlier, and more frequently, according to the perceived need.¹⁰⁹

As Frankfort recounts, "In the five days of its [the Sed festival's] duration multifarious connections between gods and king, land and king, people and king, were woven into that elaborate fabric which held society as well as the unaccountable forces of nature by strands which passed through the solitary figure on the throne of Horus."¹¹⁰

For the purposes of the festival, a new temple might be dedicated, or an existing one adapted, as required. Obelisks would be assembled or cut for the sake of constructing a "Court of the Festival" or "Court of the Great Ones", a "House of the Sed Festival" would be established to house the statues of the gods. The latter, having been transported from their sanctuaries across the Two Lands, would be the

¹⁰⁹ Frankfort states that the exact criteria for deciding the timing of a Sed remains obscure, Frankfort; *Kingship and the Gods*, p.79.

¹¹⁰ Frankfort; *Kingship and the Gods*; p.79.

subjects of considerable cultic benefactions performed by the king and his retinues over the course of the Sed. Each god, or group of gods, depending on their divine rank, would be approached and venerated according to whatever ritual formulas were recognized as appropriate. Both before and after each divine encounter, the king would enter the "Palace" to change costumes or insignia, and to gather whatever ritual attendants were called for in the next ritual. In the end, the king's rituals incorporated the Land's cornucopia of gods and priesthoods, but also the variety of attendants who represented the many local elements of the populace, as well as the Royal Kinsmen¹¹¹. It is perhaps also significant that the Sed, which remained in practice even in the Ptolemaic period, was symbolized by a hieroglyph of the two thrones of Upper and Lower Egypt placed back-to-back. As such, it symbolized not only the king's status as ruler, but also pharaoh's status as the divine unifier, the one who brings the power of Seth under the authority of Horus in a system of *maat*¹¹². In this manner, both the praxis of the festival and its pictographic symbolization reveal its purpose to be the reinforcement of the king's injunction against history. Stated otherwise, the ritual festival was meant to serve as a means of maintaining the circular time of *neheh*. Without the king's mediation and intervention, the cosmos of gods stood in danger of degenerating back into the *maat*-less disorder anticipated in the *Asclepius*.

As Assmann relates it, this prophylactic function of the Sed reaches its ideal exemplification by Dynasty III, with the development of the pyramid under Djoser (c. 2668-2649) and his chief architect Imhotep. On the one hand, the pyramid of Djoser intentionally attempted to replicate the ritual accoutrements of the Sed within the monolithic form of the pyramid's mastaba. By doing so, it is evident that the intention was to forever insure the continuous revitalization of the king – though it is perhaps not quite so evident whether it was the living king (Horus) or the dead

¹¹¹ Ibid; p.82-85.

¹¹² Ibid; p.85-86.

king (Osiris) who was thought to benefit¹¹³. On the other hand, the pyramid-structure proper, which severely transforms the traditional form of tomb design, appears to have intended goals beyond *neheh*'s preservation.

Previous to Djoser's reign, and as related at somewhat greater length in chapter 2, the principal construct of the royal tomb had consisted in a rectangular mastaba, capped with a sand-mound which was meant to represent the Primeval Mound. Beginning with Djoser, that representation of the Primeval Mound of the solar creator-god takes in startling sophistication and prominence. Setting aside the obvious fact of the massive social mobilization required for the construction of such monolithic structures¹¹⁴, one must consider the intersection of form and function. The form itself, as we have said, invokes the cosmogonic myth of the Beginning on a previously unheard of scale. The scale itself, though, betrays the significance of the Beginning and cosmogony both in the "present" of the king who order's its construction, and the "future" of that same king, then conceived as "inhabitant" of the pyramid as tomb. The symbolism is quite compact, and deserving of elaboration.

When the living king commands the construction of a pyramid, it is the Great God Horus who commands humanity towards the re-presentation of the Primeval Hill on earth. Men and society are thus ordered towards the both literal and figurative re-creation of the creation. By following the *hu* of Horus, men and society

113 Assmann points to the explicit inclusion of the symbols of the Sed in Djoser's pyramid as an indication that the structure was meant to renew the vital powers of the dead king in perpetuity (Assmann; *The Mind of Egypt*, p.55-56). However, if we accept that the *ka* of the dead king (Osiris) is none other than the Sun, we may ask if indeed this is the case. Assuming logical consistency, two other, equally engaging possibilities emerge. Either a) The pyramid's perpetual Sed is meant to benefit the living king who performs the mortuary rituals on his predecessor's behalf; or b) the pyramid is indeed meant to benefit the *ka* of the deceased – the Sun. If (a), then the pyramid may represent an additional layer in the coronation ritual, through which the deceased has worked in anticipation of quickening the vitality of the newly triumphant "Osiris". If (b), then the pyramid may represent an additional layer in the cosmogonic rituals, by which the vitality of the Sun is maintained through the activity of the Horus who constructs the tomb, who then becomes the Osiris who is buried within, and who's *ka* is that very Sun. Given that all three of these "persons" are, in a certain respect, the same person, this would further indicate the centrality of pharaoh and humanity in the maintenance of the cosmos.

114 For reference, the Great Pyramid of the 4th Dynasty king Khufu, for instance, is estimated to have had a peak of 146.478 meters in height, a length of 230.37 meters at its square base, and mass of 5.9 million metric tons at the time of its construction.

bring themselves into line with the gods and cosmos in a purposeful re-enactment of the cosmogonic myth, which itself ended with the very same *hu* and *sia* of the son of Osiris. The quaternarian structure of reality is thus re-established afresh in the holistic embodiment of *maat*. The “present” of the king as Horus, however, must inevitably give way to the “future” of death, and the accession of that same king to the throne of Osiris. The linearity of time, which is grounded in the awareness of mortality and finitude, stands at odds with the circularity of *neheh* and the end of history. Because the king is not seen as merely a ruler, but rather as the mediator and protector of the circle of *maat*, such a future without further futures must be overcome; if gods can die, one would need to admit the inevitability of history. In actual fact, this possibility is also overcome through the pyramid, the mortuary cult, and the rituals of the Pyramid Texts.

As discussed in chapter 1, while the living king was held to be the earthly, animal manifestation of Horus, in death, that same king “became” Osiris. Significantly, this “became” is consciously identified with the “that which has become... ripened to its final form... [and] is preserved in immutable permanence” of *djet*. The time dimension represented in and by the dead king is the time of Osiris, a time of permanent abiding. This abiding, moreover, transpires, for the king, in a literal state of preservation; Osiris' mummy is readied with great care by Horus before being given to the underworld:

13a. [To say: How good is the condition (?) of thy mouth after] . I have adjusted for thee thy mouth to thy bones!

13b. I open for thee thy mouth; I open for thee thine eyes, O N.

13c. I open for thee thy mouth with the *nw*, the *mś*-*tiw*-hook of copper (or, iron), which opens the mouth of the gods.

13d. Horus opens the mouth of this N.; [Horus opens the mouth of this N.].

13e. [Horus has opened] the mouth of this N.; Horus has opened the mouth of this N.

13f. with that wherewith he opened the mouth of his father; with that wherewith he opened the mouth of Osiris;

- 14a. *with the copper, (or, iron) which comes forth from Set, the mšꜣtiw-hook of copper (or, iron), which opens the mouth of the gods.*
 14b. *He opens the mouth of N. therewith, that he may go,*
 14c. *that he himself may speak before the Great Ennead in the house of the prince, which is in Heliopolis,*
 14d. *that he may carry off the wr̥.t-crown (which is) with Horus, lord of men.*¹¹⁵

The underworld to which the dead king Osiris is given, however, is not purely figurative or allegorical, at least during the early dynasties. Neither is it a "soul" or "spirit" which passes over into an afterlife. Osiris' corpse was quite literally sent to the underworld; it was buried or entombed under the earth. The god's *ka*, by contrast, went to its source, the Sun-god, of whom it was a manifestation (or emanation) and creation. In the figure of the dead king, the two meaningful modes of time could be brought into effect. In the king's abiding, mummified form, cult images, and sacred, hieroglyphic representations, pharaoh quite literally embodied unchanging *djet*. As the king's *ka* ascended back to the Sun, the source of *neheh*, it contacted with the source of circular becoming, *neheh*. As that *ka* re-united with the corpse every night, the sun which sank beneath the western horizon every evening was understood to unite with Osiris. The manifestation of *neheh* came into literal contact with that of *djet*; circular becoming with the lasting became. In a queer way, the king was more important dead than alive.

Architecturally, the pyramid was designed with the purpose of supporting this coming-together of the two, of bringing together the motion of the Sun with the stillness of Osiris in the tomb. *Neheh* and *djet*, circular time and immutable permanence, Assmann observes, were not strictly differentiated from visible spatial phenomena. In the compact experience of Egypt, becoming was generated from the motion of the Sun-god. Immutable permanence, by contrast, was phenomenally present in stone and the mummy, and apotheosized in Osiris (Assmann p.18).

115 Mercer; *The Pyramid Texts*; Utterance 21.

Bringing together *neheh* and *djet* thus entailed bringing together the sacred spaces of heaven and earth, as well as becoming and “became”, motion and stillness, life and death, the circle and the point. The pyramid, and its later, less grandiose form – the pyramidia – brilliantly embodied these principles. It first retained the symbolic form of the Primeval Hill, but improved upon the older sand replicas by adding a clearly delineated square base representing the four quarters of heaven with its four corners (p.59). It joined the symbolic lineaments of the sky with those of the earth by constructing the Hill with increasingly more durable, and thus more Osiris-like or *djet*-like materials. Sand gave way to baked mud-brick and stone, and later to stone alone. By serving as the tomb of the dead king, the pyramid became a sacred point of Osiris' stillness. By serving as an image of the Primeval Hill, it was also consciously designed as a point of emergence from the underworld – the *akhet* (horizon) for the king's *khay* (“shining forth”). As the eastern horizon was to the Sun, so was the pyramid to the king. Indeed, the very hieroglyph for *akhet* (*neheh*?) bears out the comparison, from the Egyptian perspective, as the symbol depicts the Sun-disk emerging from between pyramid-shaped mountains.

The pyramid, then, becomes the focal point of departure for the dead king's *ka* – the manifest Sun. Crucially, it also remained the point of the royal corpse's rest. The Osiris-king's own intracosmic transcendence was seen to bring together the concrete phenomena of *neheh* and *djet*. For, much as the Sun's motion must bring him and his retinue beneath the western horizon with each evening, so too must the dead king sink beneath the horizon of the pyramid. On the journey through the underworld each night, the circle of the Sun's/king's *ka* brought it back into contact with the unmoving point of Osiris/the king's corpse. Divine *ka* thus reunited with *khat* (“body” for a timeless moment, before moving along its way to shine-forth

(*khay*) from the horizon (*akhet*), thus bringing the dawn¹¹⁶. History had once again been staved off; time remained at its end, and *maat* remained in the Land.

§3. Losing Time

Lest it be thought otherwise, however, the threat, as such, was not directly posed by the representatives of the gods, whom might, at any moment, take it into their heads to seize power. Naked power was never a stable basis for rule in Egypt, and attempts to rule by power alone were clearly identified with *isfet* and the illegitimate rule of Seth. As we can tell from the remarkably vindictive, decades-long campaigns in Asia against the Hyksos after their expulsion, Egyptians did not soon forgive or forget rule by the sword. Indeed, the only firm basis for seizing the throne was *maat*, and there seems to have been only two obvious and related means of identifying the circumstances which would justify such an act.

First was obvious evidence that the head that wore the crown was unworthy. Such evidence manifested as that ruler's inability to act as the mediator of the quaternarian structure of cosmological reality – the gods, the cosmos, society, and man. A king's activity would bring *maat* and harmony, while a pretender's would bring *isfet* and disharmony. The second criteria by which to identify a legitimate challenger for the throne would be through divine election; in particular, a sign of election by Amon, the divine father of the Middle Kingdom and later epochs.

In the Egyptian understanding, as Assmann relates it, such signs of the desires or wills of the gods were elicited by a very particular means. First, the vessel of the god – its statue or “body” – was brought forth on a palanquin. Next, the

¹¹⁶ It should be noted that there are obvious parallels in this description in the comings and goings of the king's *ka* and those of the *ba* of a deceased and entombed commoner. Whether the symbolism associated with the former preceded the development of the latter, or vice versa, is difficult to say, and beyond the possible scope of this thesis. For more information on the *ba* of the commoner, refer to chapter 3.

relevant question was put to the god-infused cult image, preferably in a form which was answerable with a yes or no gesture, or some other straightforward positive or negative reply. The god would then move the perched vessel in the appropriate manner in order to make manifest its reply¹¹⁷. Such prophetic signs of the gods' will were the basis for direct communication between humanity and the divine. We can thus assume that similar divine signs proved the basis for the legitimate seizure of the throne¹¹⁸. It certainly served Alexander the Great well during his visit to the temple of Amon at Siwah, and we can safely presume that such consultations had a long tradition by the time of the Macedonian conquest. That being said, the god was not consulted lightly or easily. The cult body of the god lied within the holiest of holies, the innermost sanctum of a given temple complex. The act of bringing forth the god's vessel required considerable preliminary purifications and rituals which could only be initiated by the high priest, and conducted by those skilled in the ritual formulas. Consulting the god would thus require the initial effort of convincing the priesthood to enable access, and we can imagine that that would be no easy matter.

With regards to the maintenance of an established rule, however, the proper means of maintaining the a-historical status of the land lay through the king's regular performance of rituals. The propitiating and provisioning (and, occasionally, threatening) of the Land's many deities and temples stand to mind as straightforward examples of such activity. What may seem less straightforward, from a modern perspective, would be the sacred tinge of those activities which a

117 See Assmann; *The Mind of Egypt*; p.301-302.

118 The sudden accession of general Horemheb to the throne at the end of the 18th Dynasty, for instance, is unlikely to have occurred without the explicit endorsement of Amon. In the wake of the Amarna Revolution, and the death of both Akhenaton and later his son, Tutankhamen, a clear crisis seems to have arisen, possibly related, in part, to a plague. Whatever the details, an Egyptian queen, either the widow of Akhenaton or of Tutankhamen, made the unprecedented move of beseeching the Hittite king to send her a son whom she might marry and make pharaoh. Horemheb appears to have been implicated in a conspiracy instigated by the traditional forces of Egypt, represented by the temple of Amon, to cut-short this attempt at extending the Amarna lineage. In the end, the coup culminated in the assassination of the Hittite prince Zannanza, Horemheb's accession to the throne and his recognition as the son of god, and a fifty year war with the Hittite Empire. See Assmann; *The Mind of Egypt*; p.224-226, 250-254. Cf. Mercer; *Ancient Records of Egypt*, v.3; §22-32.

modern would classify as merely political or economic. Even war, that age-old game of princes and states-persons, possessed a character which one would normally associate with "holy war". Certainly, the regular expeditionary campaigns which were undertaken by kings for untold centuries against "the Nine Bows", the traditional appellation of the various rudderless enemies which lay over the horizon of *maat*, had this tint of sacred action. At least as early as the lifetime of 3rd Dynasty, the symbolism of the Nine Bows had been well established. The statue of Djoser, which accompanied him in his pyramid, is neatly inscribed with the Nine Bows placed strategically under and around the king's feet. And Mentuhotep I, whose reign brought the end to the 1st Intermediate Period, could in temple inscriptions found in Gebelen, boast of:

*" Binding the chiefs of the Two Lands, capturing the South and Northland, the highlands
and the two regions, the Nine Bows and the Two Lands "*¹¹⁹

Evidently, such campaigns were not, at least in early centuries, conducted for the sake of conquest or colonization, or for the sake of civilizing the barbarians – the spaces of the Nine Bows remain outside of and distinct from the Two Lands. The sacred character of the expeditions came from their punitive and prophylactic intent. The king, by initiating such wars, protected the sacred, a-historical *maat* of the Two Lands by assuring that the chaotic mish-mash and the periphery the world would not disrupt it. Through war, the chaos of history could be shut out. Immediately after the expulsion of the Hyksos, the implementation of sacred war as a means of overcoming time reached a fever pitch.

On the one hand, the symbolic comprehension of such war shifted, as the war against Asia took on the character of a war against Seth. As such, the wider world

119 Mercer; *Ancient Records of Egypt*, v.1; §423H.

took on a meaningful position within the semantics of the Egyptian myth. On the other hand, that new form of sacred war, unlike the punitive campaigns of earlier eras, had a much more aggressive and world-shaping intent. Earlier, punitive expeditions against the Nine Bows, such as those of Mentuhotep, were not conducted with the intent of bringing order to the chaos of Asia. They merely sought to protect the only true order possible – Egypt. The sacred wars of the New Kingdom, exemplified by those of Thutmose III (c. 1504-1450), sought to bring the forces of “Seth” under control. Asia was no longer understood to be a meaningless abyss which could never be anything more than a purposeless and ineffective jumble. Rather, from the end of Dynasty Seventeen, Asia was the realm of the quarrelsome god of power and the tempest, who stood in permanent opposition to the law of his nephew Horus. Asia was thus in opposition to order, rather than beyond it.

The foreign expeditions of Dynasties Seventeen and Eighteen thus took on the character of ritual re-enactments of the cosmogonic myth, as Horus (the king) sought to subject Seth (Asia) to *maat*. By the end of the reign of Thutmose III, the king's *maat* had come to incorporate much of Syria. Moreover, the signs of his wrath against Seth's forces (the Hyksos, in particular¹²⁰) were left in the form of commemorative stelai as far as abroad as the eastern bank of the Euphrates in Mesopotamia¹²¹. Asia had finally been brought within the horizon.

The conquests in Asia were not simply representative of the pragmatic successes of Egypt, and a new-found aggressiveness. They are fundamentally comprehensible as sacred wars against the exigencies of time and history, which

120 The Hyksos, in particular, were identified as Seth worshipers in the imagination of Egyptians. This likely came about as a result of syncretistic identification of Seth with the Hyksos' own native god Baal. The end result seems to have been both a similar identification of foreigners with Seth-worship, and the identification of Seth with the chaos of Asia. See Assmann; *The Mind of Egypt*; p.198-201 and *ANET*; p.230-232.

121 See Mercer; *Ancient Records of Egypt*, v.2; §478.

threatened the perfected, circular order of creation. In a certain sense, though, one might question whether there was ever anything like a non-sacred war in Egyptian understanding. If both internal war (*stasis*) and foreign war (*polemos*) possessed the sacred end of either establishing, re-establishing, or protecting the *maat* of the Beginning, then one may justifiably wonder when and whether there was ever a profane war involving the Two Lands. The war against time, however, was complicated enormously by the experiences of the Second Intermediate Period and the New Kingdom.

For one, there is the difficulty which arises from recognizing the population of Asia as the representative forces of Seth. The identification of Seth with Asia, as discussed earlier, occurred alongside the experiences of foreign conquest by the Hyksos, and certainly captured a new spirit of anxiety. Never again could foreign peoples be dismissed as an annoying, un-orderable rabble at the periphery of civilization. From then on, Asia represented a profound threat to *maat* and thereby to existence. While it may not be possible to pin-point exactly why the older symbolism of the forces of chaos (the Nine Bows) came to be supplanted with the symbolic association with Seth, the transition had its ramifications. Within the context of the cosmological myth, Seth was required to submit to Horus – by acquiescing to *maat* if possible, but by subjugation to force of arms, if necessary. Time could not be brought to its end until force submitted to authority in the true order of the cosmos. In practice, however, the conquest of the wider world was simply not achievable. The pharaohs of the age inevitably ran up against the cosmological empires of the Hittites in the north, the Hurrians to the east, the Minoans and Mycenaean across the Mediterranean, and the Nubians and Ethiopians to the south, while nomadic tribes of Libyan and Arab peoples ruled the deserts to the west and east.

Moreover, the incorporation of the conquered peoples of Africa and Asia presented its own problem to *maat* and pharaonic rule. For, for many such peoples, the legitimacy of Egyptian rule rested primarily, if not solely, on the basis of power. The notable exception to this was Kush, which incorporated itself into the Egyptian myth so fully that it established its own pharaonic regime after its separation from the original¹²². In fact, so well was the myth of the Two Lands internalized by the Ethiopians that it would be Ethiopian kings from the south who would fight to restore *maat* in the Land after the Third Intermediate Period.

Whatever pragmatic, and even paradigmatic, successes that the empire might have had over the course of imperial expansion, those successes did not put an end to the experience of history. Seth was not contained and incorporated, but merely pushed into an even more distant and dangerous horizon. The threat of future conquests was not expunged, and the inflation of the empire's size only introduced new challenges to its order. Most of the conquered lands were themselves only held within the empire through the constant shows and application of force. When Egyptian power waned, or was redirected towards the ambitious internal projects of kings such as Akhenaton, the subjected lands broke away from Egyptian control. Indeed, "control" or "organization", as opposed to "order" seems to be the appropriate technical term. The peoples of Syrian quite obviously did not experience the king's *maat* as "theirs", or as the measure of their existence. The king's constant shows of force indicate that the pharaoh was well acquainted with this fact, and with the need to constantly reassert control.

122 For a brief history of the rise of Kush, see Assmann, *The Mind of Egypt*, ch.22, 23. For our purposes, it is worth noting that Shabaka, the legendary restorer of the Two Lands and preserver of the Memphite Theology, himself hailed from Kush, as did the other kings of the 25th and 26th dynasties, save perhaps for Necho I (c.?-664). The ease with which these kings incorporated themselves into the Egyptian order, compared with the Libyans or the Hyksos before them, or with the Assyrians and Persians after them, is rather striking. It may be taken as an indication to which the Kushite kings perceived the order of the Land to be *their* order, that is to say, familiar and paradigmatic. There is little indication that these kings considered themselves, or were considered to be, different in any substantial sense.

From the point of view of a political scientist, the phenomenon of Egypt's foreign empire presents an odd situation. On the one hand, one is presented with a core of cosmological order which binds itself to the king as the mediator of *maat*, and son of god. This core of order within the expanding cosmological empire apparently consisted, exclusively, of Upper and Lower Egypt, and, possibly, Kush, Ethiopia, and the Punt. On the other hand, one has the organized holding of the empire, which submitted to the king's power, but whose residents did not feel themselves bound-up in the Egyptian myth. These "outsiders within" consisted of Libyans, and the sundry peoples of Syria as far as the city of Karchemish, on the western bank of the Euphrates, near the boundaries of Cilicia. The Egyptian empire of Dynasties XIX and XX fit neither the model of a purely cosmological empire – a political order founded in the cosmic myth – nor that of an ecumenic empire, which is nothing so much as a political organization, controlled and maintained through power. It was, apparently, a confused mish-mash of both – an order forced by its pragmatic successes to organize and control an indigestible periphery. Far from bringing an end to history and time, the foreign conquests of the myth only served to deform Egypt's form in odd new ways. In the conscious attempt to restore a timeless, formal order, the ever-expanding house of the pharaoh increasingly became a mere organization – a political unit without intrinsic form. This was exactly the opposite of what had been intended.

§4. Time's Horizon

From the very earliest epochs, Egypt had been ordered towards the end of time. The difference between the model of the early Egyptians and that of a truly

apocalyptic vision, was that the former perceived that end – that telos – to lay in the past. That past, in turn, was re-made into an eternal present by bending the march of time back upon itself, by making time circular. Hence, the most salient difference between the cosmological practices of ancient Egypt, and the apocalyptic visions of St. John, Mohammed, or Isaiah, or the metastatic projects of Auguste de Comte or Karl Marx. The Egyptians neither intended to re-create the cosmos, nor to escape it, nor looked forward to being released from it in a prophetic future. The wise Egyptian sought for the paradigm of existence in the memory of the past, rather than in a vision of the future, and sought to preserve that perfected past through the assiduous maintenance of its many embodied, recorded, and institutionalized expressions. Time, in other words, was to be overcome through the preservation and re-enactment of the cosmogonic myth, *ad infinitum*. The mortuary cult, which sought to bring about the unification of *neheh* and *djet* by bringing together “Osiris-N” and the Sun-god, stands as the most obvious example of this impulse towards preserving the end.

Of course, time and history happened anyway. The typical response, however, was to reverse the damage as much as possible and with as little intentional adaptation, or change, as was possible. For over one-thousand years, the entire stretch of time spanning the beginning of the Old Kingdom to the onset of the Second Intermediate Period, the pattern seems to have been remarkably successful. Even those notes of skepticism which were expressed in such works as *A Dispute Over Suicide* and *In Praise of Learned Scribes* stopped short of calling for the overcoming of the basic premises of Egyptian civilization – maintaining time in a circular form. No one seems to have called for Egypt to embrace *iyt* or *hprryt*, which would have been tantamount to embracing change and contingency.

Rather, the preservation and re-enactment of a memory of the past remained the essence of Egyptian order, right up to its disappearance. The fact that that memory was mediated by myth, however, allowed for a certain amount of evolution – that is to say, mutation and adaptation – of the memories which were re-enacted. Countering that effect, however, was the remarkably static medium of memory's transmission – the inscription of hieroglyphs in stone (preferably granite), and ritual practices. The remarkable feature of hieroglyphs is that their basic significations remain steady across immense time-spans, even as spoken language and phonetic writing adapts and mutates. Their inscription upon stone only furthers the effort at preservation, and the rendering of memory static. Similarly, rituals may remain remarkably static over the ages, even as the original context and interpretation changes, or is forgotten. The caveat, of course, is that even a well meaning and honest exegete or priest may misinterpret symbols and symbolic practices, and thus unintentionally introduce change when applying them in contemporary circumstances¹²³. The most notorious example of such intra-civilizational misinterpretation out of Egypt would undoubtedly be the so called “Book of the Dead”, which was nothing so much as an appropriation of the rituals of the royal mortuary cult of the Old Kingdom for the supposed benefit of commoners. The very fact that those ritual texts were then treated as if they were intended for use as magic spells demonstrates the extent towards which even honest mistakes can have an immense impact upon personal and social reality.

In spite of all of this, in spite of the stubborn insistence in maintaining the cosmogonic, cosmological myth as an abiding, present reality, a suspicion of ultimate failure evidently crept into the consciousness of some. Our evidence of this lies in both the Turin King List, and the historiogenetic works of Manetho. In both cases, one is presented with a true and evident case of historiogenetic historiography

¹²³ See, for instance, Dodds, E.R; *The Ancient Concept of Progress*; ch. 9, for that author's list of examples of rituals which had survived to his contemporary, Orthodox Christian Greece from pagan, pre-Homeric times.

– of a far distant, sacred past of maximal reality antedating progressively shorter and more profane ages leading up to the author's present. In both cases, time is construed as a line beginning with a dynasty in which the gods themselves ruled on earth as in heaven. This golden age is then followed by a shorter age of direct rule by demi-gods, then a dynasty of quasi-divine ancestors, of great kings, of good kings, and then of progressively more mediocre (if not bad) rulers.

These historiogenetic constructions are of interest for several reasons related to their structural reinterpretation of the Egyptian experience and its symbolization. Firstly, one must observe the chasm of time and space which separates the writer's present spatio-temporal reality from the divine ground of the gods. In each case, the separation is both physical and profoundly historical; the gods are no longer "here" but "there", and the forms of order which follow in their wake of their departure are but progressively worse, or even demented, attempts at imitation. In either case, the chasm of history is speculated to be tens of thousands of years wide. Secondly is the very subtle subversion of the king, or at least of the applicability of the traditional symbolic representation of the king in the circumstances of the present. As discussed in chapter 2, by the traditional understanding, the living king *is* Horus, much as the dead king *is* Osiris. No overwhelming spatial or temporal distance was perceived separating those gods from the Two Lands. In Manetho's history of Egypt, and presumably in the case of the badly-damaged Turin King List, both lay in that distant past --- Osiris in the dynasty of gods, Horus among the ranks of the demi-gods. The obvious implication, of course, is that the present king (who was either Ptolemy I or II in Manetho's case) is not a god, and neither were the predecessors – not since some far-distance, bygone era. The less obvious implication is that the mortal rulers were never really capable of uniting *neheh* and *djet* – of ending history. Thirdly is the implication which the *Asclepius* makes explicit – that there is no order

to the cosmos, or that cosmos must degenerate into chaos – that *maat* must give way to *isfet*.

The experience of the cosmos as profane, and the assessment of its essence as a process of progressing profanity, thus precedes the Hermetic myth of the disenchantment of the world by perhaps as much as 1800 years. It precedes Weber's thesis of the same by perhaps 3100 years. It preceded the advent of Christianity by as much as 1200 years, and the fall of the Kingdom of Israel by several centuries. It is equally remarkable to note that the previous discussed Egyptian metastatic and apocalyptic literature – particularly the *Potter's Oracle* and *The Oracle of the Lamb* – preceded the advent of universal soteriologies in the Western ecumene by several centuries.

With regards to the Egyptian experience, however, several things seem to be indicated by the development of first historiogenesis, and then metastasis and apocalypse as symbolic expressions of temporal existence. On the one hand, there appears to be the suspicion that the world of the Two Lands did not subsist in an intrinsically divine cosmos. The experiences of the 2nd Intermediate Period taught the lesson that the spatial horizons of the Land needed to expand outward for the sake of protecting the circular order of *maat*. Conversely, the experiences of the New Kingdom demonstrated that the horizon could never expand far enough, and that even successful expansion more often resulted in organized holdings rather than an expansion of order. The temporal horizon of cultural memory also revealed the difficulty in maintaining *maat* once it had been won. For a sensitive soul, the spectacle of the Land's supposedly circular and sacred order continuously flying off of its axis must have been tremendously deflating. In the end, the historiogenetic speculations would seem to represent the breaking-point in the cosmological myth of Egypt. When trust in a quarternarian structure of reality – of cosmos, gods,

society, and man – can only be maintained in the face of both experience and education by regulating the gods to a bygone eon, the myth is surely in danger of snapping.

On the other hand, calls for a metastatic transformation of the cosmos indicate the fortitude with which the rupture of the myth was resisted. While the *Asclepius* surely laments the passing of the old gods from Egypt, *The Potter's Oracle* equally anticipated their return. As the mere writing of *Asclepius* indicates, the hope for a perfectly circular cosmos persisted well into the Christian era. However, as the author of that text also candidly admits, the abandonment of the temples and of the cosmogonic rituals rendered that hope laughable and unachievable. The gods of Egypt were incapable of ending history on their own.

Chapter 5 - Final Words

§1. The Ecumenic Age

“And now it hath been told you on each several point, – as man hath power [to tell], and God hath willed it and permitted it. This, then, alone remains that we should do, – bless God and give Him praise; and so return to taking thought for body [’s comfort]. For now sufficiently have we been filled with feast of mind by our discourse on sacred things...” – The Asclepius¹²⁴

As was elided in chapter 3, the furious expansion of Egypt's frontier under the 18th Dynasty provides one with a curious theoretical spectacle. On the one hand, the self-represented *raison d'être* of Egyptian society was existence in an analogue of a static cosmos. On the other hand, the expansion itself was hardly in keeping with the re-presentation of an unchanging cosmic order. Egypt seems to have been in blatant conflict with itself, and such a massive oddity deserves some reflection. Several questions, in fact, present themselves. To begin, one would ask for the reason by which such an action as imperial expansion was justified, given the contrariness of the escapade.

As discussed in the introduction, §3, the answer seems to lie in what Voegelin often termed the habit or tendency to literalize or “hypostatize” symbols in such a fashion as to divorce them from the originating experience. As Voegelin briefly remarked in volume IV of *Order and History*, such cosmological symbols as those which represented the king as “ruler of the four quarters”, for example, were liable to be construed as a mandate for a literal rule of all things under heaven. The true, symbolic meaning, by Voegelin's reckoning, is that such a symbol was meant to indicate a concrete society as a *cosmion* – a cosmos in miniature – with its king as the analogy of the supreme god. In the case of the Egypt of the New Kingdom, the hypostatized symbol would appear to be Seth, who was no longer construed as purely representative of the raw force or power of a cosmos brought into order

124 From G.R.S. Mead; *Thrice-Greatest Hermes*, Vol. 2, [1906], at <http://sacred-texts.com/gno/th2/th251.htm>, XV.xl.4.

under Horus – as a force internal to the Egyptian cosmion. Rather, the Seth which needed to be subdued came to be identified with the external force of Asia, and, of the Hyksos in particular. This distortion of the cosmological symbol provided the basis for an imperial expansion, which, all things being equal, made no sense from the perspective of the original principle of the Egyptian order.

This then again raises the question as to whether the expanded Egyptian imperium qualifies as an ecumenic order in the sense developed by Voegelin. That it was, in some sense, a multi-cultural empire there can be no doubt, given the ease with which the peoples of the Syrian expanse broke away from it, and reverted to some variation of their previous order. To judge from Voegelin's perspective, however, the salient characteristics of an Ecumenic Age is a radical break with the *oikoumene-oceanos* symbolism of cosmological order¹²⁵. In its stead, the philosopher observed that an ecumenic order will stabilize with the development of the triad of Ecumenic Empire, Spiritual Outburst, and Historiography¹²⁶.

The distinction, though, requires clarification. As related in §3 of the introduction, by Voegelin's estimation, the cosmological civilizations invariably define themselves in terms and symbols of an earthly habitat surrounded by an horizon of mystery. The imperial cosmion, along with its meaningful spatio-temporal surroundings consist in a cultural ecumene (*oikoumene*). Beyond the physical horizon of the cosmion lay the realms of mystery and the gods. The vicissitudes of pragmatic history, however, may bring about a breach in that well-defined horizon (*oceanos*) which separates "here" from "there". This, in fact, occurred in Egypt, first as a result of the Hyksos conquest, but then also as a consequence of the Egyptian wars on conquest.

125 See Voegelin; *O&H*, v.4; p.201-211, p.272-274.

126 Ibid, p.308-316.

Thus may the *oikoumene-okeanos* symbolism of a cosmic empire come under tremendous stress. The formerly contracted and self-contained cultural ecumene of the cosmion may become a jurisdictional ecumene encompassing several or many peoples, itself encompassed within a pragmatic ecumene comprising a vast field of peoples and empires stretching far beyond one's formerly well-defined horizon. As a ramification, however, it may very well become impossible to identify one's own territorial expanse with the world. With expansion comes the *travaill*es of a vast new field of power, together with a receding horizon, and the experience of an *oikoumene* encompassing a myriad of peoples and broken orders. This might, in turn, put great pressure upon the myths of the cosmos of old, as one's own cosmion is experienced as one among many. This did, in fact, come to be the case during the New Kingdom. As Voegelin observes, the Hymns to Amon, written in this period, reflect a new ecumenic consciousness, as the Sun, which formerly was seen to rise and set on the horizon of Egypt, is sensed to be the universal benefactor of all peoples:

Adoration of Amon-Re, the Bull Residing in Heliopolis, chief of all gods, the good god, the beloved, who gives life to all that is warm and to all good cattle.

*Hail to thee, Amon-Re,
 Lord of the Thrones of the Two Lands, Presiding over Karnak,
 Bull of His Mother, Presiding over His Fields!
 Far-reaching of stride, presiding over Upper Egypt,
 Lord of the Madjoi and ruler of Punt,
 Eldest of heaven, first-born of earth,
 Lord of what is, enduring in al things, enduring in all things.
 Unique in his nature like the FLUID of the gods,
 The goodly bull of the Ennead, chief of all gods,
 The lord of truth and father of the gods.
 Who made mankind and created the beasts,
 Lord of what is, who created the fruit tree,
 Made herbage, and gave life to cattle.
 The goodly daemon whom Ptah made...¹²⁷*

127 From *ANET*, p.365

While something like an Ecumenic Empire rises to consciousness during the New Kingdom, it was certainly established by the Ptolemaic Period. By that time, the cultural and pragmatic ecumene had expanded to encompass the Mediterranean and the Near East as far as India – and Ptolemy's Egypt was but one contender among several seeking to reduce it to an ecumenic jurisdiction. What the empire of the New Kingdom lacked, however, was either an effective Spiritual Outburst or the development of historiography per se. While the Amon Hymns represent an adaptation of the traditional myth, to employ Voegelin's language, it does not represent a differentiation of the truth of existence from the truth of the cosmos. Life under the universal Amon is still recognizably intra-cosmic existence in a cosmos of gods made static. Nothing like an Historiography of a universal mankind would arise from within Egypt at that time.

The historiographic work of Manetho, which reportedly attempted to bring the history of the Greek and Jewish peoples within that of Egypt, would not arise until a later age. Much the same must be said of Hermetic historiography, which was self-evidently influenced by the differentiation of noetic consciousness of Hellenic civilization, and this not purely native, nor as ancient as sometimes claimed by Hermetics, who seem to claim immeasurable antiquity¹²⁸. Given these facts, and Voegelin's criteria, we must say then that the Egyptian imperium of the New Kingdom was an Ecumenic Empire without ecumenic order. It was, as observed in chapter 3, a brittle combination of a core of spiritual order bordered by a vast, organized power-holding; a core of order in a lake of mere organization.

§2. The Hermetic Response

¹²⁸ Garth Fowden places the origin of some of the texts in the 1st century B.C, at the earliest, with others originating later. See Fowden, Garth; *The Egyptian Hermes: a historical approach to the late pagan mind*; Cambridge University Press [1986] ; p.1-3.

The effective establishment of an ecumenic order would not arise from Egypt. It is true that some fairly cynical attempts at creating a universal cult capable of representing the Ground of universal mankind were attempted by the Ptolemies. One calls to mind the vigorous patronage and exportation of the syncretistic cults of Serapis and of Isis as examples. Both cults did, in fact, achieve some success in the Western ecumene – Tacitus reports Isis being worshipped among the Suevi in Germany in the late 1st century A.D and an entire district of Rome (*Regio III*) was reportedly named after the two foreign gods under Caesar Augustus. The attempts, however, were rather defective for a number of reasons. On the one hand, one notes that the syncretism of those cults did justice to approximately none of the cults which they attempted to fuse and to supersede. In fact, they treated as interchangeable such variegated symbols as, for instance, the Zeus of Hellas, the Amon of Egypt, the divine fire of the Stoics, etc. etc. Isis, for one, was meant to stand in for the familiar Egyptian Isis, the Demeter of the Eleusian Mysteries, the hypostatized *physis* of the natural philosophers, and quite possibly the Ishtar of Mesopotamian myth. Such identifications could only be done by explicitly treating the symbols as “things” or concepts, thereby subordinating them to the Second Reality of the conquerors (or would-be conquerors) *libido dominandi*. The syncretistic cults, whatever success which they may have enjoyed, were all too obviously rooted in the concupiscential exodus of the Alexanders of the age, rather than the spiritual exodus which might culminate in a Spiritual Outburst. To state the matter differently, what was needed was an image of transcendent reality. What was given was an immanent, Second Reality which was aimed at continuing the subordination of existence to the empires of the world.

Both the ancient cults and the syncretistic *religio civile* were eventually eroded away by the arrival of truly universal, transcendent faiths – first Christianity and

Manicheanism¹²⁹, later Islam. It was a transition which was long suppressed by Rome, but ultimately sped along its course by Constantine's Edict of Milan, which rescinded all suppressive measures enacted against Christians within the Roman Empire. Time would ultimately decide in favour of the epiphanies of Christ and Mohammed, which remain dominant in Egypt in the 21st century. In the 3rd and 4th centuries, the soteriological apocalypse of Christ was vigorously opposed by such cosmological movements as those of the Hermetics.

The Asclepius is therefore an interesting dialogue for more than its implied polemics against the iconoclasm of Christianity and Judaism. What is truly remarkable about the document is the attempt which is made by the author to subordinate, what Voegelin might have termed, the epochal consciousness of the philosopher's *Nous* to the earlier, mythic consciousness of the cosmos. A few choice passages may serve to illuminate the matter:

[I.i.1]. [Trismegistus.] *God, O Asclepius, hath brought thee unto us that thou mayest hear a Godly sermon, a sermon such as well may seem of all the previous ones we've [either] uttered, or with which we've been inspired by the Divine, more Godly than the piety of [ordinary] faith.*

If thou with eye of intellect shalt see this Word thou shalt in thy whole mind be filled quite full of all things good.

If that, indeed, the "many" be the "good," and not the "one," in which are "all." Indeed the difference between the two is found in their agreement, – "All" is of "One" or "One" is "All." So closely bound is each to other, that neither can be parted from its mate...

[II.iv.1]. *The Lord and Maker of all things, whom we call rightly God, when from Himself He made the second [God], the Visible and Sensible, – I call him Sensible not that He hath sensation in Himself (for as to this, whether or no He have himself*

129 It is interesting to note that, while Voegelin treats Manicheanism as an ecumenic religion of the same kind as Christianity and Islam, Augustine – who was himself a Manichean for a number of years – explicitly indicates that the god of Mani was conceived as a substance, was immanent to the cosmos, and was therefore not the god of Christians, the Jewish people, or Plato. Compare Voegelin, Eric; *O&H*, v.4; ch.2, §3, and Augustine; *Confessions*.

sensation, we will some other time declare), but that He is the object of the senses of those who see; – when, then, He made Him first, but second to Himself, and that He seemed to Him [most] fair, as one filled to the full with goodness of all things, He fell in love with Him as being part of His Divinity.

2. Accordingly, in that He was so mighty and so fair, He willed that some one else should have the power to contemplate the One He had made from Himself. And thereon He made man, – the imitator of His Reason and His Love...

[V.ix.1]. But, O Asclepius, I see that thou with swift desire of mind art in a hurry to be told how man can have a love and worship of the Heaven, or of the things that are therein. Hear, then, Asclepius!

The love of God and Heaven, together with all them that are therein, is one perpetual act of worship.

No other thing ensouled, of Gods or animals, can do this thing, save man alone. 'Tis in the admiration, adoration, [and] the praise of men, and [in their] acts of worship, that Heaven and Heaven's hosts find their delight...

[V.ix.3]. Some, then, though they be very few, endowed with the Pure Mind, have been entrusted with the sacred charge of contemplating Heaven.

Whereas those men who, from the two-fold blending of their nature, have not as yet withdrawn their inner reason from their body's mass, these are appointed for the study of the elements, and [all] that is below them.

[V.xi.4]. Man, then, being thus created and composed, and to such ministry and service set by Highest God, – man, by his keeping suitably the world in proper order, [and] by his piously adoring God, in both becomingly and suitably obeying God's Good Will, – [man being] such as this, with what reward think'st thou he should be recompensed?

If that, indeed, – since Cosmos is God's work, – he who preserves and adds on to its beauty by his love, joins his own work unto God's Will; when he with toil and care doth fashion out the species (which He hath made [already] with His Divine Intent), with help of his own body; – with what reward think'st thou he should be recompensed, unless it be with that with which our forebears have been blest?¹³⁰

130 From G.R.S. Mead; *Thrice-Greatest Hermes*, Vol. 2, [1906], at <http://www.sacred-texts.com/gno/th2/index.htm>

The oddity here is that the philosopher's consciousness of himself as participant in the divine movement (Voegelin's In-Between or Metaxy), is both present and distorted. The Hermes Trimegistus of the dialogue clearly identifies himself with an epoch-making theophany given only to a spiritual elite. The theophany, in turn, is not an event which the experiencer (the one with Mind) may just as well discard or do without – it carries with it the demand for human response. But a response to what? The Hermetic thinker directs the response towards not the Ground in the *epekeina*, The Beyond, of the cosmos. The Creator of the Hermetic myth is strangely present in all things (One in All, All in One), and blends imperceptibly with the creation, Cosmos. The transcendent Ground of Plato and Aristotle is thus transformed into a radically immanent, super-ordinate entity which is apprehensible through participation in Mind. However, the purpose of the Hermetic theophany is further revealed to lie not in the fulfillment of human existence, but the fulfillment of the cosmos qua cosmos.

The Hermetic myth, thus, reveals itself as contra not only the soteriological, eschatological differentiations of Christianity and Israel, but also the anthropological differentiations of Hellas. Both noetic and pneumatic consciousness are willed to be subordinated to the mythical consciousness of the cosmos. Having differentiated the truth of existence from the truth of the cosmos, the Hermetic author then urges that the tension of existence be sublimated towards the cosmos anew. It is essentially the creative use of noetic insights to urge the wise to commit the noetic differentiation to oblivion. Thus, the luminosity of consciousness is to be blotted-out to whatever extent possible. In a dramatic reversal of the philosopher's ascent, the Hermetic sage advises his pupils to re-enter the cave, and wall-up the exit behind them. Humanity, it seems, should content itself with the icons of the intracosmic gods. However, the sage must admit that the attempt is doomed. Eventually, the cosmos, bereft of man's

devoted ministrations, will fall into a state of utter vulgarity, necessitating the Creator to destroy and to remake its degraded creature:

[IX.xxiii.2]. Asc. I am amazed, Thrice-greatest one; but willingly I give assent to [all] thy words. I judge that man most blest who hath attained so great felicity.

Tris. And rightly so; [for] he deserves our wonder, in that he is the greatest of them all.

As for the genus of the Gods in Heaven, — 'tis plain from the commixture of them all, that it has been made pregnant from the fairest part of nature, and that the only signs [by which they are discerned] are, as it were, before all else their heads.

3. Whereas the species of the gods which humankind constructs is fashioned out of either nature, — out of that nature which is more ancient and far more divine, and out of that which is in men; that is, out of the stuff of which they have been made and are configured, not only in their heads alone, but also in each limb and their whole frame. And so mankind, in imaging Divinity, stays mindful of the nature and the source of its own self.

So that, just as [our] Sire and Lord did make the Gods æonian, that they might be like Him; so hath mankind configured its own gods according to the likeness of the look of its own self.

[IX.xxiv.1]. Asc. Thou dost not mean their statues, dost thou, O Thrice-greatest one?

Tris. [I mean their] statues, O Asclepius, — dost thou not see how much thou even, doubttest? — statues, ensouled with sense, and filled with spirit, which work such mighty and such [strange] results, — statues which can foresee what is to come, and which perchance can prophesy, foretelling things by dreams and many other ways, — [statues] that take their strength away from men, or cure their sorrow, if they do so deserve.

Dost thou not know, Asclepius, that Egypt is the image of the Heaven; or, what is truer still, the transference, or the descent, of all that are in governance or exercise in Heaven? And if more truly [still] it must be said, — this land of ours is Shrine of all the World.

2. Further, in that 'tis fitting that the prudent should know all before, it is not right ye should be ignorant of this.

The time will come when Egypt will appear to have in vain served the Divinity with pious mind and constant worship; and all its holy cult will fall to nothingness and be in vain.

For that Divinity is now about to hasten back from Earth to Heaven, and Egypt shall be left; and Earth, which was the seat of pious cults, shall be bereft and widowed of the presence of the Gods.

And foreigners shall fill this region and this land; and there shall be not only the neglect of pious cults, but—what is still more painful,—as though enacted by the laws, a penalty shall be decreed against the practice of [our] pious cults and worship of the Gods—[entire] proscription of them.

*3. Then shall this holiest land, seat of [our] shrines and temples, be choked with tombs and corpses.*¹³¹

The apocalypse of Hermes Trimegistus thus seems to differ from that of St. Paul in certain key respects, particularly from that perspective of the apostle which was maintained by Voegelin. That philosopher maintained that Paul's vision of the Resurrected was to be correctly interpreted as a vision of the process of reality moving beyond its structure, in the direction of transfiguration. In that Apostle's particular language, the end of that process was to conclude in the *aphtharsia* (imperishing-ness) of existence – a state to be brought about at any moment by the intervention of God. By Voegelin's reckoning, Paul's pneumatic apocalypse revealed the salient features of reality: i) reality's status or structure as process, ii) the peculiar status of mankind as neither object in the process of reality, nor subject above it, but as participant, iii) the "luminous" consciousness or self-awareness of certain participant of their participation, iv) the noetic differentiation of the features of participatory existence within the cosmosv) the pneumatic differentiation of the curiosity or mystery of the transfiguration of the process of reality which moves beyond its own structure.¹³²

In comparison with the apocalypse of Voegelin's St. Paul, the apocalypse of Hermes Trimegistus either lacks or fallaciously subordinates several factors in

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² For Voegelin's analysis of Paul, see *ibid.*, ch.5. It is important to note, regarding point (iv), that Voegelin has remarked that Paul's noetic analysis of his theophany of the Resurrected was "defective". See, in particular, *ibid.*; p. 267-271.

reality. The process described in *The Asclepius*, it is true, bears a superficial resemblance to the Platonic myth of the ages and of the inundations. However, whereas Plato's dialogues emphasized the worth of differentiations in consciousness which constituted epochs, the Hermetic dialogue calls the meaningfulness of the process into question. Of what use, after all, is a process which leads humanity away from the static contemplation and worship of a static cosmos, if indeed such is the purpose of existence? The Hermetic fusion of the One and the All (the equivalent of the One and the *apeiron* which so interested Hellenic philosophers) together with the truths of existence and of cosmos results in a hypostatized reality (the One-All) which differentiates a subset of itself (humanity) in a participatory movement in itself and towards itself, which must invariably derail and be corrected by the Creator. One is left with a myth of the process in which the structure of reality mysteriously moves away from transfiguration, rather than towards it. One also is presented with an existence which forever looks backwards, towards the undifferentiated, cosmological existence of a bygone era. The truth of history which is constituted by the very differentiations of consciousness which permits the author to write *The Asclepius* is conceived as a disordering force to be overcome and forgotten.

In fact, in spite of the author's nostalgia for a past era, such Hermeticism itself represents the breach in time no less fully than the faiths which the writer seems to decry. The speakers of the dialogues stop far short of lamenting the differentiation of noetic consciousness which made their form of philosophizing possible. Quite to the contrary, it is evident that they valued the delights of noetic contemplation. Instead of abandoning or rejecting the Hellenic breakthrough, the main speaker attempts to reserve it for a blessed elite, while committing to oblivion the well-known differentiations of the One and the *apeiron* which had occupied philosopher's since the 5th century B.C. In essence, the author would seem to desire to reverse history

part-way, to some grey period between the still compact insights into the process of Anaximander, and its further differentiation, entailing the analysis for its implications for existence and for politics, under Socrates and Plato. The Hermetic writer would apparently like just a little bit of illumination, but not too much. He would like to peek outside the cave without being dragged out. It is, at its base, an untenable position, as it calls for the history-creating differentiations and theophanies to occur without consequence – for philosophers, prophets, and apostles to act as if nothing had happened, and act as if existence remained unchanged. It is philosophy as a hobby.

In spite of such conflicted rear-guard actions, the ancient form of Egyptian order was irreversibly breeched by the life-time of Augustine. Cosmological order had already, increasingly broken-down during the early Ecumenic Age, under the Achamaenids and the Ptolemies. By that era, it became ever-more obvious that no cosmion could adequately represent the ground of being which, if it subsisted anywhere, certainly did not seem to subsist in the apparent vortex of power and *pothos* which both drove, and was driven by, the concupiscential exodus of the empire builders. *Maat* first became less a reality than a phantasy, then a rather ridiculous phantasy, and finally, with the triumph of the Church, was finally designated as a bad dream of a profane world, without which one was better off when awakened.

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